

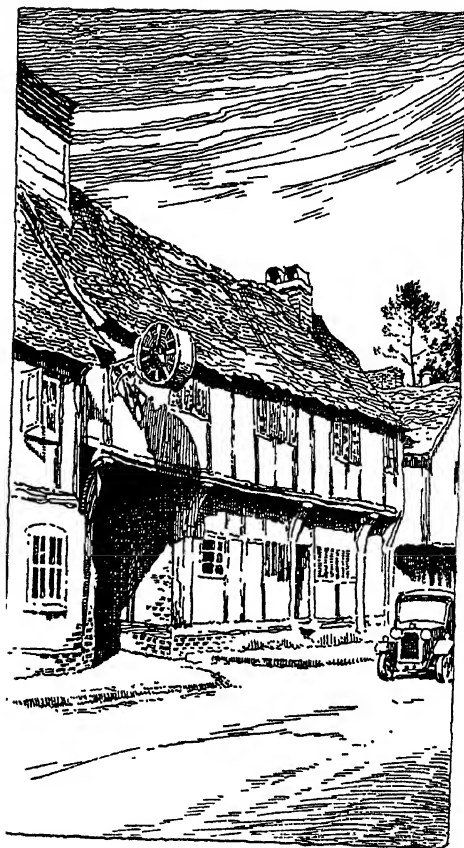
UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



137 569

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

ENCHANTED WAYS



SERENE HOURS

Enchanted Ways Through England and Scotland

By

JOHN PRIOLEAU

*Author of 'The Open Road Abroad'
'Car and Country', 'Little Motor Tours'*



WITH NUMEROUS DRAWINGS
BY G. E. CHAMBERS,
AND MANY MAPS

New York

WILLIAM MORROW & CO. INC.



PREFACE

I HAVE called them enchanted ways—what else are they, the roads of England and Scotland, that change under your eyes every hour of every day?

I have tried to write down what I have seen, ever since I can remember open country. Woods and valleys, friendly birds and beasts in wild places; great hills and forgotten villages at the end of empty lanes; the sea breaking in cold fury on the grey beaches of the north, amusedly on the sounding shingle of the south; remote islets at the mouths of lochs in the blue dusk of a midsummer's night; rivers, brooks full of trout, estuaries with coastwise shipping—a handful of ill-drawn sketches of ten thousand pictures that renew themselves for you every day, by enchantment and nothing else, from the Goodwin Sands to Cape Wrath.

The truth is that every time you take your car out on a tour you are a small boy again. It is not on a tour you set out, but on a voyage of discovery. You have Smith Minor's private knowledge that your real name is Livingstone or Cabot. For you, specially for you, all England and all Scotland is strange to-day, to-morrow and for ever, a place where you will be the first to set foot.

Not a spring or an autumn passes but you see the moors of Yorkshire and Devonshire for the first time; never a summer or winter but you come to Kent and Argyllshire, Anglesey, Surrey, and the Severn-side with the eagerness you would bring to your first sight of the Dolomites or Tahiti.

JOHN PRIOLEAU.

LONDON, 1933.

The greater part of the material of this book has appeared in the form of articles in the *Observer*, to whose Editor I should like to express my thanks for permission to make use of it.

CONTENTS

PART I—THE HEART OF ENGLAND

| CHAP. | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I. THE COTSWOLD, WORCESTERSHIRE, WARWICKSHIRE | 3 |
| English Villages. Not for Sale. The Cotswolds in Winter. Burford, Sunrising Hill, and Broadway. Autumn on the Cheltenham Hills. Piccadilly in Gloucestershire. Chipping Campden. On the Edge of the Wold. White Ladies and Red Horse Valley. Apples and Plums in Spring. | |
| II. THROUGH THE SHIRES | 18 |
| In Oxfordshire. A very English County. Where Three Counties Meet. Brill. In Herefordshire and Shropshire. Spacious England. Up the Golden Valley. On Wenlock Edge. The Peak. A Pearl in a Sty. | |

PART II. NORTH

| | |
|--|----|
| III. THE LAKES AND THE EAST RIDING | 35 |
| In Cumberland and Westmorland. Among the Lakes and Fells. Dream-hills across a Sea. Crummock Water. Buttermere. The Colour of the Lakes. Coniston. Windermere, from the Right Side. Kirkstone Pass. Across Yorkshire. The Curlews and Yourself. Sutton Bank. Buttertubs. | |
| IV. IN YORKSHIRE AND WESTMORLAND | 47 |
| Spring Among the Dales. The Enchantment of April. Where Air is Health. Rivers and Hills in Summer. The High Moors in September. Ullswater. Winter on the High Road. | |

PART III. SCOTLAND

| CHAP. | PAGE |
|---|------|
| V. THE LOWLANDS AND THE WAY THERE | 63 |
| From Scotch Corner. Ways East and West. The Lowlands. An Ancient Discovery. St. Mary's Loch. The Grey Mare's Tail. The Border. Pirates and Cattle-rustlers. A Perfect Hill-road. Alnwick. Scots' Gap and Cambo. The Gaelic Alps. Snow. The Great North Road and Tropics at the End of it. | |
| VI. THE WEST COAST | 75 |
| The Enchantment of the Western Isles. Glen Croe. 'Invero.' The Mull of Kintyre. Loch Linnhe. Glen Coe. The Western Glens. Invergarry and the Stags. Skye and the Eagles. | |
| VII. THE HIGHLAND ROAD | 86 |
| The Highland Road to the Dee. Glenshee. How to Explore. June on the Dee. North of Inverness. Two By-ways to the Border. | |

PART IV. SOUTH

| | |
|---|-----|
| VIII. IN SUSSEX | 103 |
| In Sussex. Where Ways are Always New. Its Forests. Herons' Ghyll. Doomsday Green and Henry II. Its Coast. Snapdragons and Mushroom, Figs and Hydrangeas. | |
| IX. HAMPSHIRE AND SURREY | 117 |
| 'They.' Nightingales and Primroses. Chobham Ridges. Puttenham Common. An English Winter's Day. Unfamiliar Roads. Queen's Corner. | |
| X. IN DORSET | 130 |
| The Country of Peace. From the Top of the Purbeck Hills. West in the East Wind. 'Foreigners.' Mainsail Haul—and All Saints. English Rivers. March Winds in Hampshire. Spring in the New Forest. The Quiet Town. | |

CONTENTS

xi

PART V. EAST

| CHAP. | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XI. IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE | 153 |
| Rupert Brooke's Country. Should Essex be Raised? Her Treasures—and Tutankhamen's. Emperor's Green and the Allied Sufferings. A Great Straight Road. To the North Sea and the Wash. A Corner of Kent. | |
| XII. LINCOLNSHIRE, NORFOLK, KENT, ESSEX | 168 |
| In Lincolnshire. Where the English Sky is Blue. King's Lynn and Sandringham Woods. Romsey Marsh. Brook Street to Bilsington. With the Little People. Castles in Kent. Essex Flats. Bradwell Quay and New Quiet. Osea Island. The Black- water River. Buttons Hill and 'Billericay. The Country of the Medway. | |

PART VI. WEST

| | |
|--|-----|
| XIII. THE SEVERN RIVER | 191 |
| Both Sides of the Severn. West—and East. Our Noblest River. A House in the Water. Pimlico Sand and Bullo Pill. Cheddar Gorge and Bath. | |
| XIV. IN CORNWALL | 201 |
| Particularly in Spring. A Blue Sea. Bedrugga, Rejarrah, and Tucoyse. Also Praze-en-Beeble, with Constantine. Brighton. The Land's End and the Road Away from It. Troy Town. The Middle West. The Decorations of Spring. Part of Ermine Street. | |
| XV. SOMERSET, HAMPSHIRE | 212 |
| The Black Hills of the World. Those in Somerset. Charmouth and Gittisham. The Golden Glory of Dartmoor on the Horizon. Winter-time in Somerset. Wells and Middlezoy. And Shaftesbury. Sea, Forest, and Hills. Springtime near the Solent. The Raising of Hythe. Buckler's Hard. | |

| CHAP. | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XVI. THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS | 223 |
| Over the Downs. By-ways of the Past. The White Horse Hill. The Ridge Way. The Downs in Spring. Gold and Silver. King Alfred's Well. The Heart of it All. South of Bath. The Mendips and Quantocks. Blagdon Hill. The Foss Way and Dead Maid's Corner. | |
| XVII. THE WEST COUNTRY | 233 |
| The West Country in April. The Devonshire Rivers. Where Summer is Trapped. The Valley of the Exe. Over the Moors. From Dunster to Ivybridge. Friendly Roads. October Days. Sausage-rolls and Pasties in Barnstaple. The Best of the Dart. From Darkness to Light. | |
| PART VII. ON THE EDGE OF LONDON | |
| XVIII. BY-WAYS ROUND GUILDFORD | 253 |
| By-ways Round Guildford. Surrey Hills. Spring in the Chilterns. The Treasure You Find there. The Golden Trees. Their Endless Variety. All the Year Round. The Three Hundred of Aylesbury. Stonor Hill and the Little People. 'To Fairyland.' Autumn on the Thames. The Road Round London. Where Four Counties Meet. | |
| XIX. THE THAMES | 273 |
| A Hill in Hampshire. Some Curious Facts. The Thames itself. Round London. | |

LIST OF MAPS

| NO. | PAGE |
|---|-----------------|
| SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND | <i>Endpaper</i> |
| 1. STRATFORD, WINCHCOMBE, BURFORD | 7 |
| 2. CAMPDEN, CHELTENHAM, CIRENCESTER | 10 |
| 3. WORCESTER, BURFORD, BANBURY | 14 |
| 4. BYFIELD, BUCKINGHAM, THAME | 20 |
| 5. SHROPSHIRE, HEREFORDSHIRE | 25 |
| 6. THE PEAK COUNTRY | 29 |
| 7. KESWICK, NEWBY BRIDGE | 36 |
| 8. EGREMONT, AMBLESIDE | 38 |
| 9. PENRITH, MILLOM | 40 |
| 10. COCKERMOUTH, KENDAL | 42 |
| 11. ALSTON, BAINBRIDGE, SCARBOROUGH | 48 |
| 12. HAWES, BARNARD CASTLE | 50 |
| 13. WINDERMERE, WHITBY | 55 |
| 14. FROM SCOTCH CORNER | 64 |
| 15. BY ETTRICK WATER | 67 |
| 16. THE ELIOTS' COUNTRY | 69 |
| 17. THE SOUTH COAST OF SCOTLAND | 72 |
| 18. THE WEST COAST | 77 |
| 19. THE WESTERN GLENS | 81 |
| 20. INVERNESS TO SKYE | 84 |
| 21. THE HIGHLAND ROAD | 88 |
| 22. GLENSHEE AND THE DEE | 91 |
| 23. INVERNESS AND JOHN O' GROATS | 95 |
| 24. TWO WAYS TO THE BORDER | 98 |
| 25. IN SUSSEX | 105 |
| 26. THE SUSSEX FORESTS | 106 |
| 27. SOUTH OF LONDON | 110 |
| 28. THE SUSSEX COAST | 114 |
| 29. THE MEON VALLEY | 119 |
| 30. BEACONSFIELD TO SUSSEX | 122 |
| 31. QUEEN'S CORNER | 128 |
| 32. THE DORSET COAST | 131 |
| 33. SHERBORNE TO SIDMOUTH | 136 |
| 34. SALISBURY TO CORFE | 139 |

| NO. | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 35. TEST AND AVON | 143 |
| 36. IN HAMPSHIRE | 148 |
| 37. GRANTCHESTER | 155 |
| 38. LONDON TO THE EAST COAST | 157 |
| 39. LONDON TO THE WASH | 161 |
| 40. IN KENT | 164 |
| 41. THE LINCOLN FENS | 170 |
| 42. NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK | 174 |
| 43. ROMNEY MARSH | 177 |
| 44. CASTLES IN KENT | 180 |
| 45. IN ESSEX | 182 |
| 46. THE MEDWAY COUNTRY | 186 |
| 47. THE SEVERN | 193 |
| 48. GLOUCESTER TO CHEDDAR | 198 |
| 49. CORNWALL | 203 |
| 50. THE MIDDLE WEST | 207 |
| 51. ERMINE STREET | 211 |
| 52. THE BLACK DOWNS | 213 |
| 53. IN SOMERSET | 218 |
| 54. ROUND SALISBURY PLAIN | 221 |
| 55. THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS | 225 |
| 56. SOUTH OF BATH | 231 |
| 57. DARTMOOR AND EXMOOR | 235 |
| 58. LYNMOUTH TO IVYBRIDGE | 240 |
| 59. CORNWALL | 243 |
| 60. DEVONSHIRE RIVERS | 246 |
| 61. ROUND GUILDFORD | 254 |
| 62. IN SURREY | 257 |
| 63. THE CHILTERNs | 261 |
| 64. FINGEST AND BRILL | 265 |
| 65. IIVINGHOE HILLS | 268 |
| 66. TO FAIRYLAND | 274 |
| 67. THE THAMES | 278 |
| 68. ROUND LONDON | 282 |
| 69. SURREY AND HAMPSHIRE | 285 |

·

PART I

THE HEART OF ENGLAND

·



CHAPTER I

THE COTSWOLDS—WORCESTERSHIRE—WARWICKSHIRE

AN American, in England for the first time in his life, asked me if there were any part of the island, after Stratford-on-Avon, which would be worth visiting for the sake of a lasting impression of the land of his remote forefathers. He suggested several—apart from Stratford-on-Avon—and most of them contained large manufacturing cities. He showed me a list drawn up for him by a London tourist agency, which was anxious to ‘show him England’, and it embodied Nottingham, Northampton, Leeds, and Leicester. The Lake District was apparently dismissed with the town of Windermere; and the ‘East Coast’ itinerary contained Hull, but neither Lincoln nor Norwich. There was no mention of either Oxford or Cambridge, but Salisbury was starred.

It was a document that had to be read to be believed, and I am afraid that some of my own suggestions for ‘seeing real English life’ were so different from those of the firm to which he was prepared to pay considerable sums for expert guidance, that he thought I was either deliberately misleading him for some dark purpose of my own, or that I was profoundly ignorant of the whole subject. What he

demand, amongst other things, was 'representative' English towns, and none that had no factories seemed to fill the bill. I could not persuade him that England still lives in the country, and uses her towns only when she must. He spoke of civic pride, but there I was unable to follow him.

When he had departed upon an amended edition of his horrible tour (still, however, determined to regard Stratford-on-Avon as the only thing worth a second glance), I found myself heading for the Cotswold hills in a kind of terror lest my acquaintance with them all these years had been but a dream, and that the soul of ancient England really lived in Hull and Leicester. I wanted to make quite sure that those English villages were still there. They were all there, each in its place, and as I crept in abasement of spirit through Winchcomb and Broadway, Shipton-under-Wychwood and Burford, and, above all, Chipping Campden, I realized again how very much richer I was than ever I had imagined.

There are many ways among the Cotswold villages, and it matters little which you take. They are compactly arranged, as if their hills were a private kingdom; yet to go from one to another you must sometimes cross frontiers and borrow a few miles from neighbouring counties. Indeed, that is all to the good, for you see them in perspective as well as in detail. At Wotton-under-Edge, for example, where you climb up that wonderful hill from the village to Kingscote, and Calcot, and Tetbury, you look out north upon them in spirit if not in eye, as if they were specially staged for you. From the road below Birdlip you look up the sheer flank of the hills which make their ramparts. From the Chipping Norton road you see them or the hills which enfold them as you see your own garden from the middle of it. They may not be in sight, but you feel them near you.

I started, after my disturbing experience with the man

from Ohio, from Shipston-on-Stour, having come from London by Banbury (I was in no anxiety about Stratford-on-Avon), and I made straight for Chipping Campden, the English village which is even more beautiful than Broadway. I can spare Chipping Campden least of any corner of England; but my fears were groundless. It was, as ever, either a place as much your own as your hearthside, or one through which to drive bareheaded. It is incomparable.

Thence I went down the hill to Aston Subedge, and so to Broadway and along the lower road to Winchcomb, revelling in my great possessions. I did not wish to enter Cheltenham, so I turned up to Guiting Power and then by Andoversford, all among the open hills, and down the deep valley north of Birdlip, and so to Painswick, the edges of Stroud, touching the Bristol road at Cambridge (do you know it?), and then up by Wotton-under-Edge to the great empty spaces on the way to Malmesbury.

This was, for the day and mood, the best of it, but I made haste to count all I had, and I went on to Cricklade and Cirencester, and north to Fossbridge and Bourton-on-the-Water, and so, by Stow-on-the-Wold and Long Compton back to Shipston. I had drawn a line round the chief of my treasures, and only in the late evening remembered Burford, and Fairford, and Lechlade. The run there and home, by Faringdon and the Berkshire Downs in the cool summer dark, finished my accounts. Nobody had sold the English villages. I have them still to welcome me for so long as I have the freedom of the road.

.

Unless you are looking for places where winter comes down so lightly, so tamed by the winds off the Gulf Stream that in the sheltered coves there is hardly a sign of it three weeks out of four save the shortened daylight hours, there are few parts of England better suited for a Christmas road-

cruise than the Cotswold hills. They are admittedly cold hills, and the long rows of trees that you see standing up against the distant horizons show plainly in their normal attitudes how shrewdly the big winter winds blow up there, how hard and for what uncounted weeks. Yet they are not bleak, if that unhappy word implies lifelessness. At no time of the year are the Cotswolds cheerless, and, except in the far south-west, I know no part of England where the winter light is stronger.

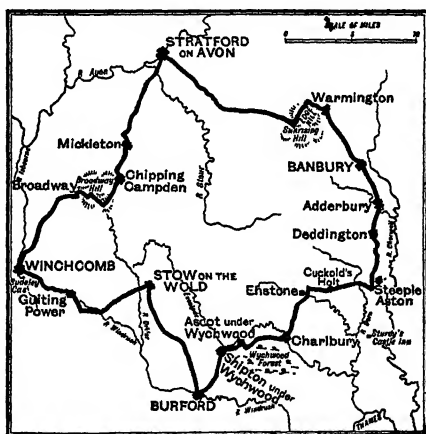
There is another reason why the Cotswolds make a particularly suitable Christmas playground for the wandering motorist. They are the most obviously English part of England, not only for the big fields, the fine hedgerows, and the ancient stone walls, but for the houses. There are no houses anywhere to compare with those friendly grey stone buildings, with their low, wide windows, their grey roofs and their general air of established dignity. Most of them are very old, even as age is counted in an old land, but you will never find one that does not carry its years like a row of decorations. If you want what is called picturesque antiquity, which generally means advancing decrepitude, you must look elsewhere for it. The Cotswold houses look as if they have been there since the days of Elizabeth, but they also look as if they will still be there, as trim and as gay as ever, in another three hundred years.

It is curious that this essentially English country-side, manor, farm, and woodland, great down-heads open to the wide sky, should so seldom be seen in any sort of pictures, from Christmas cards to the illustrations in books on England. Most of the other counties, from Devon to Kent and Suffolk, can be identified in these works, while the neighbouring shires, particularly Warwickshire, are worked almost to death; yet the Cotswold hills and villages, most typical and most beautiful, are conspicuously neglected.

It is no matter for complaint. The longer England can

guard her secrets, keep herself to herself, stay beyond the edge of the limelight which is flooding every most intimate corner of the world, the better for all of us. It is not inhospitality but common sense. The one thing that does not benefit by publicity is scenery.

For a comfortable winter day's drive take Stratford-on-Avon as the northernmost and Burford as the southernmost points, and drive eastward first. The chief reason is that



you want to begin the day with the contrast between the valley and the view over it from the top of Edge Hill, though I am not quite sure whether, strictly speaking, the high ground that lies between Kington and Banbury is part of the Cotswolds or not. None of my numerous maps of all scales has anything to say about it. It is of no consequence, in any case, for so soon as you have rounded that sharp curve on Sunrising Hill and approached Edgehill Tower, the look-out, west over the valley and south towards the unmistakable Cotswolds where the perfect villages lie hidden, it is a matter of complete indifference to you in

what part of the British Isles you may be. You are more than satisfied.

Keep on along the top of Edge Hill as far as the fork and then turn down to the right by Warmington to Banbury and then follow the Woodstock road as far as Steeple Aston. It is a well-worn highway in summer, I know, but none the less you will find unexpected delights, particularly at Adderbury. At Steeple Aston you turn to the right again and take the road to Enstone and Charlbury, where you are beyond question in the Cotswold and among memorable place-names. Before Enstone comes Cuckold's Holt, and after Charlbury, Wychwood Forest, Ascot, and Shipton-under-Wychwood, beautiful names for beautiful places, the two last. Shipton in particular will delay you. It is a perfect piece.

Then comes Burford and the way over the hills past Habber Gallows to Stow-on-the-Wold. You keep on westward by Lower Swell to Naunton and Guiting Power, a by-way that brings you eventually to the cup in the hills where stands Sudeley Castle, just above Winchcomb. The way is not too smooth, and a good map must be carried lest you take any of several wrong turnings, but it is all very much worth while. You will have it all to yourself. An alternative way is by Upper Swell and Ford, which leads past Stanway to the Cheltenham-Stratford road, but you miss Winchcomb.

Down in the valley, below Stanway, you drive north again to Broadway, the Cotswold village that publicity has done so much to spoil. In spite of everything, sophistication and transatlantic fame included, it still remains a wonderful place, and if you have the luck to find it empty of sightseers, you will find its ancient charm and dignity little impaired. Broadway is always the same; it is only less beautiful when it shows that it has come into money. From that wide street, mellow with age, you drive up the

big Fish Hill (officially but seldom known as Broadway Hill) to the beginning of the Five Mile Drive, nine hundred feet above the sea, and then turn to the left for Chipping Campden.

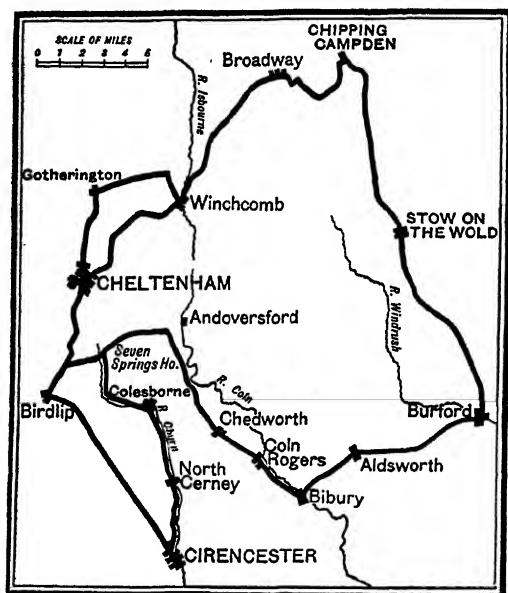
On your way back to Stratford you can turn off at Mickleton to Broadmarston, if you feel of an inquiring turn of mind, and pass the priory whose best bedroom has a bed in which the Virgin Queen passed one night. I who write have passed two in it (in February), and I can only marvel at the fortitude of that sovereign.

.

Of all the counties of England in which winter is as good a touring time as summer—and there are many more than you might think—Gloucestershire and its neighbours hold perhaps first place. It has a rather forbidding reputation as being the coldest of them all, and it may be that that is the reason why you generally find even its high roads empty from November to April. Certainly there is no denying that the winter winds sweep across its rolling hills with a freedom which, though invigorating, calls leather and fur to the aid of hardihood, but nowhere, except in Norfolk, and, in clear weather, parts of Devonshire, will you find such sparkling air, nowhere such wide views. Given the right sort of day, especially if frost has the country in its grip, the roads over the hills about Cheltenham will show you that winter driving can be at least as happy an adventure as summer driving, that it does not need a June sun to bring out the real beauties of this most English of English counties.

A winter's day spent between Stratford-on-Avon and Cirencester can give you one of the most lasting memories of a year's touring. From those open roads above the valleys you get an unending and unbroken succession of impressions, sharp-cut for you by the clear, biting hill air,

which you will remember long after the recollection of scenery in milder climates has faded. The broad sweep of the Cotswolds, shoulder upon shoulder, blue woodland melting into space or framing, as in the field of a telescope, the dim outlines of yet more hills at a distance which is ten or a hundred miles, according to your faith; the Hereford-



shire hills across the Severn, and the Welsh mountains beyond them, all form a gallery of pictures, all different, yet all dissolving the one into the next, that will keep you in a state of astonished delight the livelong day.

Make your start from Cheltenham northwards, taking the familiar road to Winchcomb. There is another and rather longer way, by Gothenington and Stanley Pentlurge, which makes the round of Nottingham Hill, but it lacks

the fine climb up Cleeve Hill which shows you your first sight of the hills towards Wales. A mile or so out of Cheltenham on this road is a lane to the right leading to a farm called Piccadilly, at the foot of a thousand-foot hill, Cleeve Common, or a neighbour. How does a Piccadilly explain itself here? There is a New York in Kent, but it is hardly a stranger name than this.

From Winchcomb you follow the main road to Stratford-on-Avon as far as Broadway, and then turn right-handed up the Fish Hill. At nearly a thousand feet above the sea you will stop and look back over the Vale of Evesham, to right and left over the heart of the Cotswolds. Not even the view from the top of Birdlip, sixteen miles or so to the south as the crow flies, is more wonderful. In summer time the crest is thronged with cars, as the gay little street of Broadway itself is as busy as Stratford with sightseers, but now you will be very unlucky if you do not have all that great spread of country to yourself.

A mile or so from the inn you take the turning to the left, at the beginning of the Five Mile Drive, and come soon to Chipping Campden, the perfect English village, the least spoilt, the least changed of them all. There are some in different parts of England which are nearly as beautiful in various ways, a very few of which, by sole reason of their position, a river, decorative hills or a wood, are lovelier seen at a distance, but none to compare with Chipping Campden in its faultless charm. It may be thought of as a show-place by outsiders who come to see it, but it is quite obviously unconscious of it. It was as it is now hundreds of years ago, and there is no reason why it should alter by so much as a stone in the next few hundred. The years lie very lightly on those grey roofs.

Now go back a little, turn off to Broad Campden, and follow the by-ways to Blockley and Bourton-on-the-Hill, joining the main road at the other end of the Five Mile

Drive. This will bring you to Stow-on-the-Wold. Follow the Cirencester road as far as the Farmer's Arms (about a mile), and there keep to the left, up Mangersbury Hill. Another eight miles will bring you to Burford, which some have the courage to rank with Chipping Campden. It is certainly a real Cotswold village, and as such worthy of your lasting respect; but you will scarcely tolerate these exaggerations. It is the same at Bibury, ten miles on, towards Cirencester. Bibury, a show place beyond question, is beautiful, but it has a 'best time'. It is at its best in summer, while Chipping Campden knows no seasons at all.

Turn to the right along the road beside the Coln river, and by winding ways come through Coln Rogers and Coln St. Dennis and the Chedworth Woods to Kilkeny Inn, a mile west of Andoversford. Here you are high up again, well over nine hundred feet, and Cheltenham lies below you only three miles away. The direct road there turns off to the right, about two miles from the inn, by Seven Springs House, but you will turn your back on it. The road by Colesborne and North Cerney, leading to Cirencester, is not to be missed, and you will only really head for Cheltenham when you turn sharp right on to Ermine Street, just outside Cirencester. This takes you to the top of Birdlip, where you get a final look out over this incomparable country before taking the road to Cheltenham by Pilley.

It is one of the perpetual mysteries of the Cotswold hills, even within touch of places like Cheltenham and Stratford-on-Avon, that they always seem private. The 'through' cars, flashing by at express train speeds, leave no trace, save a few leaves tossed over the grey-stone walls. Generally speaking, you have most of that country to yourself, and if you come upon a gathering of cars or even a little picnic party, you may be reasonably sure that the first will be

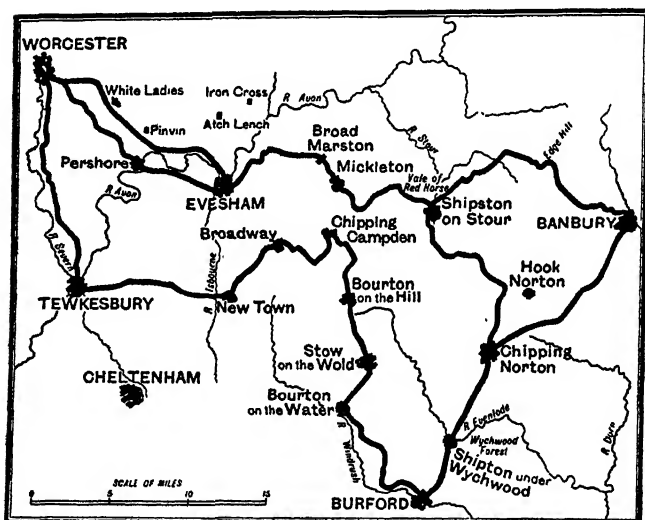
found outside an ancient inn (and they have been depressingly busy putting the clock back in the Cotswold inns, out-Tudoring the Tudor, 'preserving', which is potting, the atmosphere), and the other by the roadside where no picnic ever mattered. Only on a fine Bank Holiday have I ever felt jostled anywhere between Banbury and Stroud, Tewkesbury and Burford. The vigour of oldest England in ignoring time and obliterating what we are pleased to consider the trespasser is very reassuring.

No, there is not much danger yet that the observant traveller will regard the roads over the Cotswold as beaten tracks, however modern and excellent their surface may be. Not all of the by-ways are cemented yet, but even when they are, I doubt if they will lose their character. With perhaps three exceptions, certain lanes in the Surrey hills, the neighbourhood of one river in Devonshire, and a little piece of Essex, I know of no ways in all England that have kept their privacy like the Cotswold roads. Elsewhere, the deplorable energy of local busybodies, or whoever it is who is responsible, has uprooted beauty and dignity to make room for a few miles of track so hideous that most sane people make detours to avoid it; but that has not yet happened in the hills where stone walls serve as hedges and things are scarcely counted middle-aged till they date back to forgotten times.

Here is a way over some of them from Worcester, and though there is nothing specially attractive about that low-lying country which makes so effective an introduction to the Wold, the place-names lend it great distinction. What have you to say to White Ladies, for example, or Pinvin; the Vale of the Red Horse and Atch Lench? Later you come to Snodsbury and Iron Cross, and, by a detour, to Trafalgar.

Two roads lead you to Evesham from Worcester, the one by Pershore and the other a little to the north of it—past

White Ladies, in fact—and it does not matter at all which you take. At Evesham bear to the left for Pebworth and Broadmarston. It is frankly rather dank country hereabouts, and you will be glad to get out into the open above Mickleton and on to the road to Shipston through either the Red Horse Valley or Ebrington. As soon as you reach Shipston, turn north-eastward for Edge Hill. They say there



is a hill in the Cotswolds whence about a dozen counties can be seen on a clear day. I have never attempted to calculate how many you can see from Sunrising, having usually something better to do, but they must be many.

This detour brings you to Banbury, whence you rejoin the shorter route at Chipping Norton. From here you go down to the first of the beautiful Cotswold places, Shipton-under-Wychwood, and then to Burford. All about here, near Wychwood Forest and by the side-roads towards Charlbury and Witney, is delightful country well worth

turning aside for in these pleasantly long daylight hours. It is a straight road up to Stow-on-the-Wold if you go by the highway, but for choice go right off the map to Bourton-on-the-Water and so to Stow by the Cirencester road.

.

That great valley that begins at the south end as the Vale of Berkeley and carries the Rivers Avon and Severn, is one of the most fortunate in all England. It is bounded east, west, and south by notable hill ranges. The Cotswolds on the east, the first hills of Monmouthshire in the Forest of Dean on the south, and with the Malvern hills as a kind of preliminary fence, the glorious swelling uplands of Hereford leading to the mountains of Wales. At all times of the year, even in the direst of winters, the country between Bromsgrove and the mouth of the Severn, Bromyard, and Stratford-on-Avon, has a real welcome for the properly constituted motorist of an exploring turn of mind. When you get a clear day and happen to be on one side of it, well up among the hills, you will have spread before you some of the finest views anywhere east of Wales and Devon.

In blossom time the northern part has an appeal peculiar to itself. The apple orchards between Worcester and Pershore and Evesham are worth driving from either Land's End or John o' Groat's to see. The main blossom patch is probably not more than fifteen miles square, but if you happen to come to it on the right sort of day when fat silver clouds are leisurely chasing each other across a proper spring sky, you will certainly decide that the sight is worth all the neat regiments of tulips and hyacinths that the bulb-fields of Holland can show you. So far as I know or have been told, the apple is not originally an English fruit. It grows the world over, even though many of its varieties have pure English names. Yet I maintain that of all the splendid

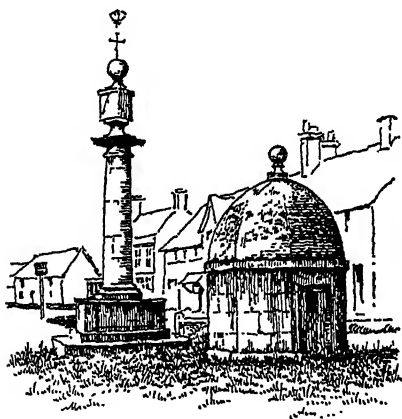
sights the wandering roadfarer can find, the most English is a big apple orchard in bloom.

A cruise round this happy valley should begin, to my thinking, somewhere near Stroud at the southern end of the Cotswolds, as much for the sake of beginning from a height as for anything else. As you leave Pitchcombe, take the left-hand road with a fork and drop down into the valley, and you get your first taste of the sort of views you are going to enjoy. Gloucester, seen close at hand, is nothing out of the ordinary as cathedral cities go, but I always think it looks remarkably well from just about here or from the Monmouth road. Cross the town and take the Ledbury road through Staunton and Bromsberrow, where you come almost within touch of the Malvern hills and look north up their almost straight edge. You will attack them from Ledbury on the road leading to Little Malvern, and though it is all on a small scale you will get the impression of one of the wilder passes on the slopes of the Alps, as the road crosses the knife-edge marked on the map as Winds Point. Here, naturally, you stop, and if you are at all lucky, find that your view straight across to Great Fish Hill by Broadway, where you will be in a few hours, is only broken by the hump of Bredon Hill sticking up nine hundred and sixty feet from the middle of the valley.

There is nothing much except speed limits and the sense of decency to keep you from hurrying past Great Malvern and down into the vale again and through Worcester—unless you include your eagerness to get into the apple country. Yet you should stop when you are a mile or two beyond Great Malvern and look back at those surprising hills. On this side their face is, or looks, perfectly sheer in certain lights. When you have left Worcester behind you and are among the orchards, time will probably cease to exist until you have emerged on the other side somewhere at the foot of the Cotswolds, but it may be worth while

keeping your note-book handy for some of the nicest place-names in the Midlands which are scattered here and there. White Ladies Aston, for example, and Grafton Flyford, Rous Lench, with its companion, Church Lench, and Abbots Lench, Throckmorton, Inkberrow, and Pinvin.

The last quarter of the run is, after the apples, the best. It begins with Chipping Campden and carries you on across the heart of the hills by Snowhill, Cutsdean, and crossing the main road through the twisting little lanes by Temple Guiting, Guiting Power, and the lovely hilly road past Sudeley Castle to Winchcomb. Coming back again, turn after Winchcomb up the other valley by Charlton Abbots to Andoversford and, avoiding Cheltenham, keep on the high ground and, passing the source of the Thames, come to the top of Birdlip Hill, whence you look back over that fortunate valley. Between Birdlip and Stroud, through Sheepscombe, is one of the best short drives in Gloucestershire.





CHAPTER II

THE SHIRES: OXFORDSHIRE, WARWICKSHIRE, SHROPSHIRE,
HEREFORDSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

FOR the Londoner hungering in the midst of November fogs for a sight and smell of open winter country, away from 'resorts' and well clear of main roads, there are few better objectives for a long day's drive than Edge Hill, or, as one signpost up there has it, 'The Edge Hills'. The way up to Warwickshire lies well to the west of the Holyhead Road, and although you cover a good many miles on a Class A highway, you will not have to complain of congestion. This is nearly as true of the Aylesbury-Bicester road in summer as now, and it has always puzzled me to discover why this excellent route north is so agreeably deserted.

Edge Hill is certainly a particularly good objective for a drive planned for the special benefit of any one imprisoned all the week amid bricks and chimney-pots. The views from the summit of the whole of that range, from Fenny Compton to Sibford Ferris, are as fine as any in the home counties, but once you have left Aylesbury behind you, the whole of the way there and back, circling Banbury and touching the fringe of the Cotswold, is an attraction in

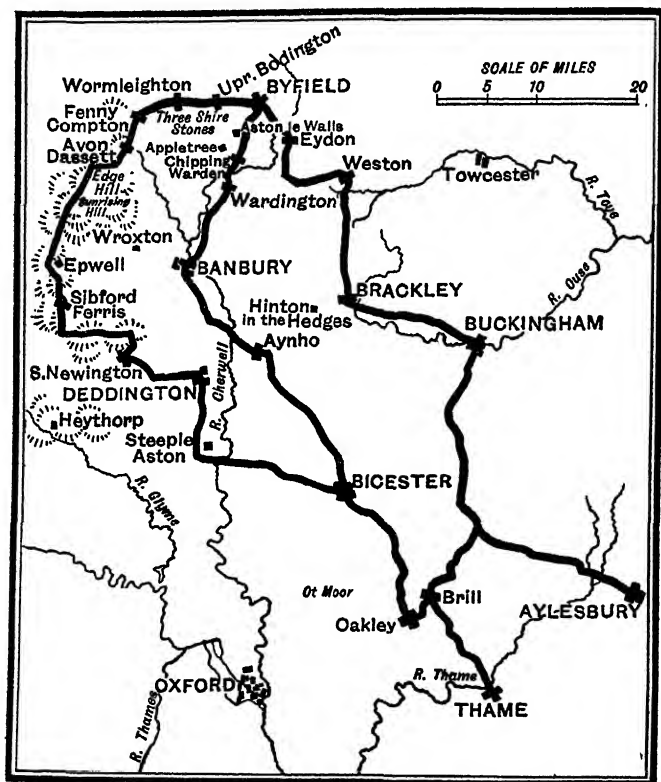
itself. You pass through the best of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, and your road lies across some of the most open and genuinely 'country' country you can find anywhere within a hundred miles of Hyde Park Corner.

You come into the open very suddenly, almost without warning, after the dreary suburbanism of Berkhamstead and Tring. At the top of the hill above Aylesbury (almost the last spur of the Chilterns) you find yourself in freedom, with hills and big fields and spinneys all about you—proper hunting country—and once through the town you revel in the brisk air and the quiet emptiness of one of the pleasantest parts of England. There are roads in plenty to choose from, though they never seem to obtrude themselves on you as do the countless roads of Suffolk, and if you have made a fairly early start the longer run by Buckingham and Brackley to Byfield is a good one to follow. For brisk going (and winter time is the time for fast driving far more than summer), together with typical Oxfordshire scenery, I prefer the shorter way through Bicester and Aynho to Banbury.

It is a magnificent road all the way, wide and safe, and usually empty, and from it you get glimpses of great expanses of country, of exactly the type in Aldin's sporting pictures, all rolling fields and hedges and ditches and timber of just the right sort for a picture of an English county. The road will tempt you to a burst of speed here and there, and you can yield safely without running the risk of missing any of the good things about you. It is a spacious land, where distance is not an illusion, as it is sometimes in closer counties.

At Bicester bear right-handed and take the road to Aynho. Hereabouts you begin to climb a little, and though there is nothing to deserve the name of a big hill, the odd four hundred feet or so you are above sea-level widen your horizons astonishingly. You will enjoy every mile of the

run into Banbury. From here your way to Byfield lies north-east, and you must traverse the town, and soon after crossing the railway bear to the left on to the Wardington road. All this is delightful country, getting hillier with



every mile. You have an invigorating climb up out of Wardington, past Aston-le-Walls, to Byfield, whence again you get magnificent views over the three counties. You are within hail of Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, and Northamptonshire, and after you turn westward to Edge Hill

by Upper Bodington, you pass close to the spot called the Three Shire Stones.

Then comes the climax of the day, your drive along the crest and just below it of that noble hill. It is not easy at first to find your way, as part of it lies across other men's land, but once past Fenny Compton and Avon Dassett you are safe enough. There are gates to be opened (and shut), but not many. The half-dozen miles between Wormleighton and Arlescote are full of charming surprises. The road runs high, as you know by your aneroid, but always there is a little range of miniature mountains between you and the glorious sweep of country you know you will see when you reach the Kington road. You come on to the brow of Edge Hill, close to Edge Hill Tower, and follow it past the top of Sunrising Hill, by Compton Winyates and Epwell, where you can turn back to Banbury by Wroxton Abbey, of the famous meet.

A better way home is to follow the winding upland road through Sibford Ferris and South Newington to Deddington, where you keep to the Oxford road as far as Steeple Aston and then turn off to Bicester once more. From here your way lies through Blackthorn and Oakley, where a short detour to the left will carry you up the famous hill to Brill, and the road to Thame.

.

It may be all for the best that Oxfordshire should be a county usually neglected by the exploring motorist, the best, that is to say, for those who know their way about its quieter roads, and the best for those who live near them. The main roads which traverse the county are not particularly interesting or beautiful, and the stranger on his way north or south could not be blamed for supposing that the country out of his immediate sight is no better—unless, of course, he is familiar with the surprises the English country-side has

everywhere for the expert explorer no less than for the stranger—but let him turn off almost anywhere, right or left, between Henley and Banbury and follow his nose, and he will find a dozen new things and make their discovery in the right pioneer spirit.

As is nearly always the case with an English county, it is impossible to explore it without crossing the borders of its neighbours. Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Warwickshire, and the pieces of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire it sequesters, all take their share in a day's cruise along the by-ways of the Oxfordshire country, though the day begins in the county itself at Henley. The first mile is the straightest of the day, and when you have reached the fork at the end of the Fair Mile and turned to the right, you know that except along the stretches of main road which are unavoidable, your course will be of the most meandering description. The by-ways of Oxfordshire must boast of more right-angled bends than those of any other county except Lincolnshire.

There could hardly be a more hopeful opening to a day's run than those few miles to Watlington. The road, rather narrow and most agreeably unsophisticated, runs gently uphill all the way, and after you have passed Stonor Park and come into that exquisite little valley which lies between Ewelme Downs and Christmas Common you begin to see what pleasant surprises there may be in store for the heedless and wise loser of his way. These begin almost at once, along the road to the River Thame, at Drayton St. Leonards, a village so wrapped in the slumber of centuries that it might be two hundred instead of two miles from Dorchester and the turbulent Oxford road. You drive completely round Drayton and find yourself back on a hidden way to Oxford, through Stadhampton and Chislehampton, and Cowley, which you will swear to keep secret.

After Oxford you can carry on north-west along the

Woodstock road to Enstone and Shipston-on-Stour. This is a main road and serves as a general indicator of your direction, but if you are in the proper mood you will abandon it soon after Woodstock and find your way across country by Charlbury, Shipton-under-Wychwood, and Chipping Norton. Naturally, you will find it impossible to keep a straight course anywhere when the Cotswolds lie on either hand, and your way to the meeting-place of the three counties will be through Moreton-in-the-Marsh, Bourton-on-the-Hill, and Chipping Campden. This, the loveliest village in the world, is in Gloucestershire. North of it is Warwickshire; west, south-west, and south Worcestershire; south of that some more of Gloucestershire, and south of that some more Worcestershire. Worcestershire lies to the south-east again, but is severed from the main body by a corridor of Gloucestershire. Make what you will of the mentality of the county surveyors who set this geographical crossword puzzle. Were the same thinkers responsible for the statement in *Carey's Travelling Companion* that part of Wiltshire was to be found near Twyford, Berks, when George III was on the throne?

Turn about in this maze and set out on the homeward run by Ebrington and Shipston-on-Stour. The road is hilly and remarkably twisting and considerable care must be exercised in taking the bends. It is beautiful country hereabouts, particularly when the orchards are loaded with fruit, and if the road were straight and level you would still make a long business of it for the sake of the views. At Shipston do not be tempted to follow the direct road south, but strike boldly eastwards in the Banbury direction. You skirt Brailes Hill, a modest eminence, and come by Swalcliffe and Tadmarton to Bloxham and across to the Bicester road at Aynho. A longer alternative is through Banbury and the road to Brackley and Baynards Green. In the middle of this triangle is a village called Hinton-in-the-Hedges.

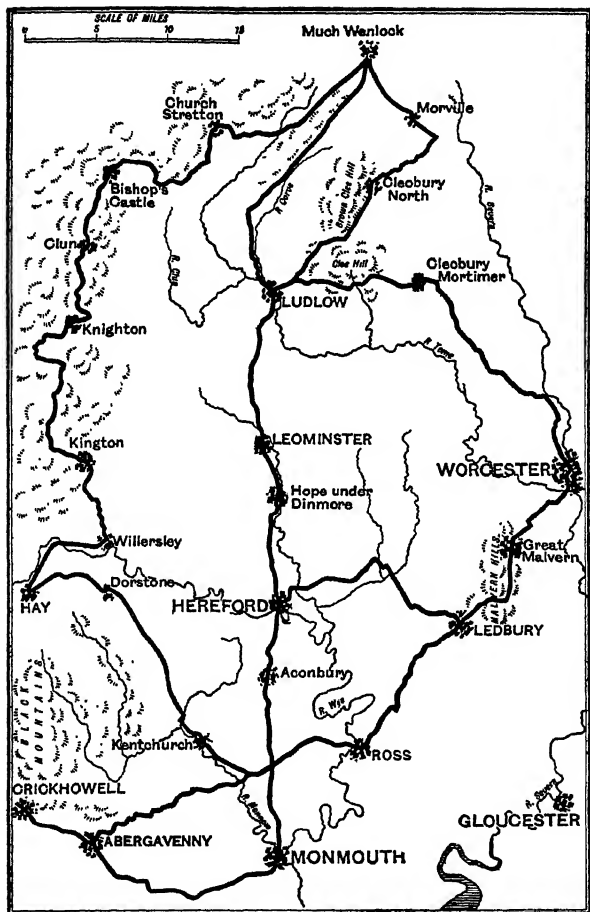
At Baynards Green you are on the road between Brackley and Oxford, but as a rule it is a peaceful place. Your next objective is Brill, but you should not, at this time of the year, take the shortest way by Bicester. In winter the roundabout way past Islip and Stanton St. John and Oakley is often too soft to be comfortable, but in summer the by-ways that skirt Ot Moor are quite practicable. Take it all slowly and let the solitude of empty English country roads work its infallible magic.

At Brill you have a show-place in the form of the famous view and when you have had enough of it, take the road to Thame and Princes Risborough and find your very leisurely way back to Henley through the beechwoods of Great Hampden; by Hughenden and West Wycombe, ending the day's drive with ancient Fingest and the lovely road down to Hambleden and the Thames.

.

It was on the way to Wales at the beginning of November that, forsaking my chosen road, I turned off at Gloucester to see how the roads in Herefordshire and Shropshire were looking at the beginning of winter. That is the worst of trying to plot out England into seasonal departments, to assign certain months to certain districts, to fit the calendar to the scenery. You fail, at the very outset, to achieve more than a renewed conviction that for England's beauty there are no seasons. Beeches and birches make it imperative to go to one place or another in spring; the same beeches and a great many chestnuts call you back in autumn; but it is absurd to say, as we all do, that these are places for spring or autumn touring—as if they lay dead in summer and winter.

I was going to see the big seas bursting on the Pembroke-shire headlands, and, my mind filled with the winter thoughts proper to such a pilgrimage, I forgot that in November,



when the last of the October colours are fading, the red land of Herefordshire—a more splendid red even than the crimson of Devonshire—and its immense timber is one of the glories of England, that among the counties that are laid out in field and meadow it is easily first in size.

Not, of course, in mere acreage, but in impressiveness. There is a spaciousness about the fields of Herefordshire, and particularly about its parks, with their noble heritage of oak and elm, which you will not find in any lesser county. As you look across from the Malvern hills to Marcle Hill, and from there towards Wales, you get a sense of space that is very unusual in England. Those who planted the coverts and chose the sites for the great trees were perhaps building better than they knew. For they were making a very noble England.

And a little to the north you come into Shropshire, where, with the suddenness of change which is one of the perpetual mysteries of the English country-side, you find yourself in a land as different as would be Surrey. The rolling hills are there, but they roll more compactly; the fields are smaller, the woods closer. It is beautiful, but it is a smaller picture. In Herefordshire you see beyond each generous landscape another; in Shropshire there is room for only one at a time.

I had forgotten this until I had left Gloucester behind and was crossing the Wye at Ross. Then I remembered how that beautiful stream wound south and north, down past Monmouth to the Severn and up through the rich pastures to Hereford and Hay, and so into Wales by that narrow sheer-sided valley, and I turned away from the Abergavenny road at Broad oak for Kentchurch and the Golden Valley. It is a pleasant run along the little River Dore, past the Abbey and Vowchurch and Peterchurch—so very ecclesiastical are the names in the richer parts of England—but, frankly, I cannot believe the name Golden

is a tribute to its beauty. It is a fair enough valley, but I think it more probable that the name of the river was originally responsible. Its principal charm, I found, was its loneliness. It was empty from end to end, save for a butcher's cart and a fat and amiable policeman.

At Hay you cross the Wye Valley and then turn off through the hills to Kington and Knighton, Clun, and Bishop's Castle. It is a winding road, close-pressed on either side by the Radnor Hills, and it is all very attractive. You will find some names for your note-book, too, such as Evenjobb and Cascob, Knucklas and Skyborry Green. During the run through to Bishop's Castle you climb to the respectable height of over a thousand feet above the sea—though you would not guess it—and if you choose to go on to the outskirts of Shrewsbury you will keep at the same level and pass between two greater shoulders—the Stiperstones to the west and the Long Mynd to the east. This is a picturesque hill-way, and if you have time I advise you to take it.

For myself, this time, I came down from Bishop's Castle to Horderley station, and there turned up the famous valley road to Church Stretton, and, climbing Hazler Hill, crossed over to the farther side of Wenlock Edge, following the road to Much Wenlock. The road down the other side of that long hump which runs through the valley of the Corve is another lonely way, and, at the risk of contradicting myself, I would advise you to take a short detour and come down to Ludlow by way of Morville and Cleobury North, which lies at the foot of Brown Clee Hill. It is more of a winter road, to my thinking. The road runs between this and Titterstone Clee Hill, both of which are over seventeen hundred feet high.

At Ludlow you are faced with a dilemma. One of the most beautiful main roads in the west lies straight before you, south through Leominster to Hereford, and then over

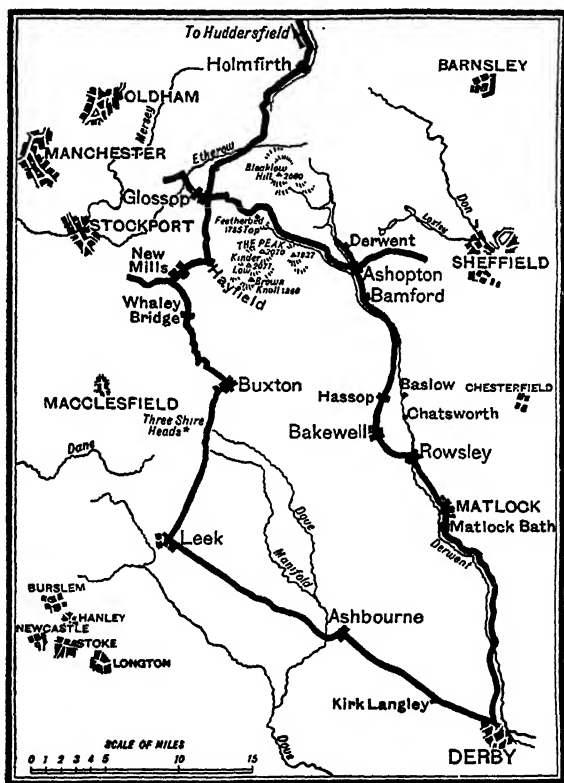
Aconbury Hill to Monmouth. To the left you have the way to Cleobury Mortimer and, through Worcester, to the Malvern Hills, Ledbury, and back to Ross. The choice must be yours, and it is not an easy one. I would not willingly miss the run between Malvern and Ledbury, specially that saddleback called Wind's Point, whence you look east and west from a knife-edge. I cannot imagine any one refusing the way south through Hope-under-Dinmore (whence you get a perfect survey of Herefordshire country) and the last miles down into Monmouth. I had to get to Wales, so I took the latter. I did not regret the other, but you might.

.

Looking at it from every point of view, there is no doubt that the high ground between Leek, in Derbyshire, and the River Derwent, Glossop, and Derby, is the most outstanding example of the grim strength and tenacity of English wild country. If you look at the map you will see that this tiny patch is hemmed in by a ring of towns, which include Manchester, Macclesfield, Oldham, Stockport, Huddersfield, Sheffield, Barnsley, Chesterfield, and the Five Towns. Enough, you would say, not only to bury it for ever, but also effectively to prevent any one dreaming of going to see it who was not a native of any of those octopus cities. Yet, although, on a fine week-end, those wonderful moors are nearly as crowded with day-trippers, afoot as well as awheel, and in every sort of car from the ancient Baby to the latest Midas, garbed in marvellous silks and furs, in shorts and tweeds, in rags and riches, hikers and Hoggenheimers, they maintain their superb dignity, their age-old aloofness.

The roads are magnificent in quality, as becomes those of a district surrounded by so much of England's most solid wealth, but in spite of their perfect surface, their signposts and warning signals, their extreme modernity, they fail as

hopelessly to make any impression on the immense hills and the open windswept summits as do the stony tracks of the remoter of the Yorkshire moors. You may, on a Sunday, be beset on every side by cars and motor cycles, by walking



picnic parties, by parties of all kinds, complete with portable wireless sets and gramophones—very strange things to take into the wild with you—but your attention is never on these, always on the dark heights above you, the canyon-like valleys below. The wonderful road which runs

between Alport Moor and the Peak can be as crowded on Sunday as the road to Hindhead, but the merry-makers make no difference. It takes more than a few hundred humans, with their machines, to spoil the grandeur of the Peak country.

Obviously, it is better to go there on any day of the week except Saturday and Sunday, but as the same thing applies at this time of the year to any famous part of England, one need not insist too much upon it. No other place of wild beauty has so much to put up with, none emerges so magnificently from the invasion. Almost one might say that it is worth going there on a fine Sunday to witness the triumph of the wild over the cities.

For those who are coming to the Peak country from the south, Derby is perhaps the best starting-point, as it provides a return journey by the Wye and Derwent. Take the road towards Macclesfield—you will constantly have these shocks—and when you get to Leek turn off north over Bareleg Hill and Axe Edge. Although there is another way to Buxton, which you must pass if you are to keep clear of Macclesfield, that brings you to the foot of the famous Cat and Fiddle, I think you would be wiser to take the more direct way. You climb in nine miles to some sixteen hundred feet above sea-level, and the views all the way are worth travelling many scores of miles to see. Even on a day of sweeping showers, scudding across the enormous hollows below, you will be delighted. The keen air, the swiftly changing light and shade, the sudden glimpses of smiling country miles away, the imminent presence of the eternal rocky hills through which you seem to crawl, however easily your car seems to put the gradients behind her, are incomparable. Axe Edge is one of the great places of England.

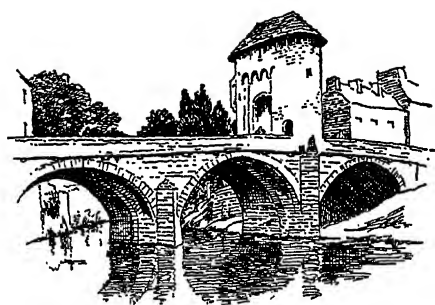
At the entrance to Buxton another shock awaits you. Your road is labelled Stockport and Manchester, and for

the second half of the run to New Mills station, after the climb up Long Hill, it is useless to look for anything except the quickest way out of what must once have been an exquisite place, but is now a desolation of urban traffic. It does not last long, and after you have turned to the right at New Mills and passed Hayfield—I wonder if it ever looked like one—and Glossop, you are in the heart of the best of it. Should you go there in June you will find the cheeriest of hopeful signals of better things to come, a shell-pink rhododendron, perfect in shape, size and colour, lighting up the murk and squalor of a Glossop cottage wall like the sun himself. It is a thing you cannot believe even as you stop and stare at it.

Then comes the tremendous drive over the hills and along what is called the valley of the Ashop. This stream, unless another is disguised in its place, is a modest brook, a timid trickle amid the boulders, but nothing save a proper river could stand a chance of showing up against those surroundings, towered over by those gaunt crags. It is from here to Ashopton that you will notice how insignificant are the crowds of cars and bicycles, how little they matter. On your right is the Peak itself, but you are less impressed by that than by the sheer flanks of the hills that press down upon that tiny valley, upon that grey strip which is your road.

At Ashopton keep to right, lest you find yourself on the road to Sheffield (only nine miles away), and follow the Derwent to Bamford and Hathersage. All the way along here to Bakewell, past Haddon Hall to Matlock, it is beautiful country, a vale of woods and river. Between Belper, farther on, and Derby there is another beautiful run, but the valley of the Derwent is not improved by Matlock Bath and its accessories.

.



PART II
NORTH



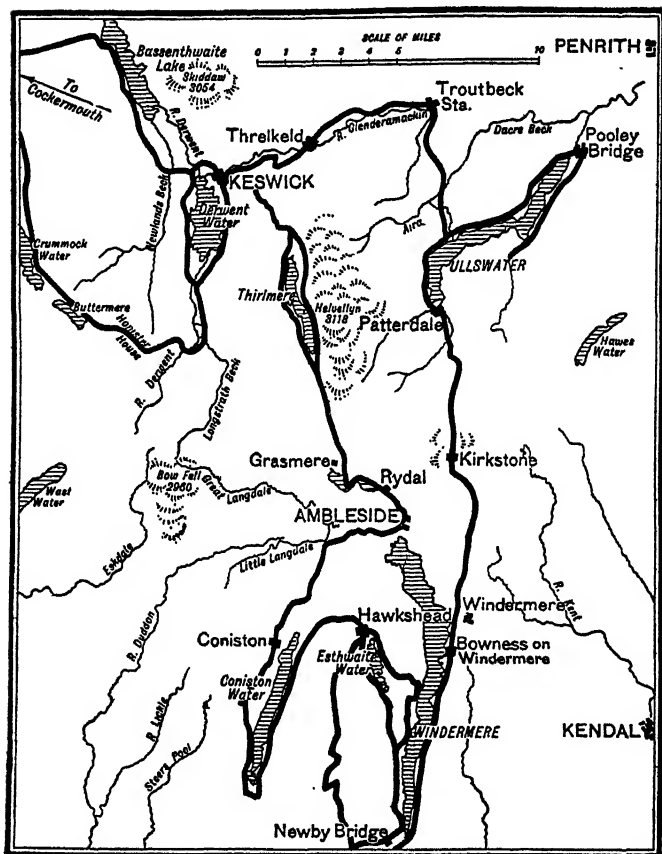
CHAPTER III

THE LAKES AND THE EAST RIDING

IN an age of national self-disparagement it is comforting to rediscover that in at least one regard the English people are as proud as any other nation. We may ridicule everything essentially English, from our cooking to the regulations by which we handicap our amusements and, so far as is possible, our enjoyment of life; but we do admire our finest scenery, and we do show it by crowding to it and upholding it not only among ourselves, which is easy, but before the faces of foreigners, which is very difficult. We make no bones about Devonshire and Surrey, North Wales, and Yorkshire. We swear by the valleys of the Wye and the Avon; we will hear nothing against Dorset and the free parts of Sussex. Of their kind there is nothing better in the world, and we are—from a British point of view—completely shameless in saying so.

Of all the most famous of English beauty-spots the fells and lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland are probably the most widely quoted as typical of what England can show. They stand very high in the list of places no visiting foreigner should miss. And when we go there, whether

it be in June or October or in high holiday season, we find fifty of our own countrymen to a single explorer from



Idaho or Dresden. If we are exceptionally lucky we find only a wise minority among the less accessible culs-de-sac, a satisfactorily long way from Windermere, but they will invariably consist of people who are drawn to those gaunt

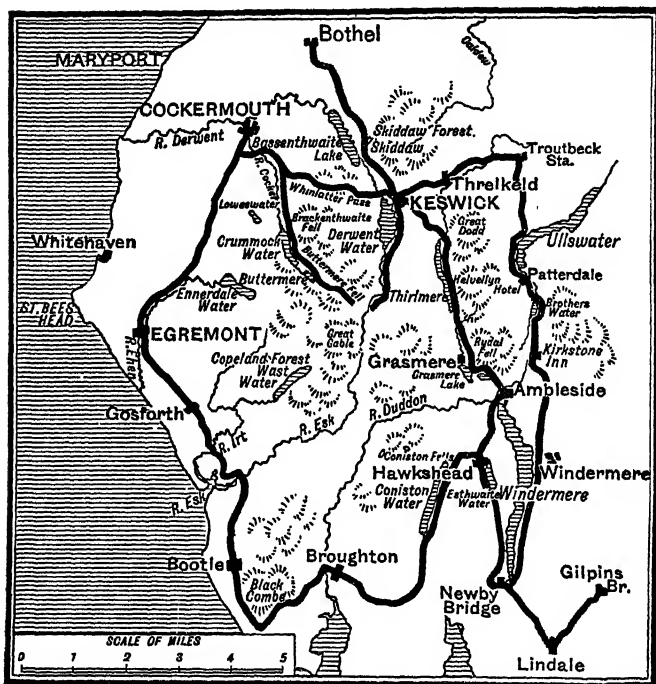
hills and exquisite pieces of water exactly as, the legend runs, people are drawn back to the Nile, to New Zealand, to Ceylon. And the legend is truth herself.

There are many ways of reaching a true appreciation of the Lake Country, but none more effective than by entering it from the north, if possible after a journey through Scotland. A patriotic Scot, with even less shame than an Englishman, once remarked that the lakes make a good introduction to the lochs, and that for this reason he always made his way to the Highlands by the West Coast route. The converse is as exact. The special loveliness of Perthshire and Argyll, with the solitary friendliness of the Lowlands as an interval, serve admirably to emphasize the beauty of the lakes and fells. There is no possible comparison. They differ from each other as from the Pembroke Hills and the Norfolk Broads, but they certainly do succeed each other admirably well.

From the north, Carlisle way, you come suddenly upon the first prospect of them, with their lovely contours and the astonishing blue and grey light in which they seem to live, in the best conditions. If you have come from the other side of the Solway Firth you will have seen them, the faint outlines of dream-hills, across the water for several hours before you reach them. I know of no other hills in Great Britain which beckon to you from a distance of forty miles across a bay, and it is an experience worth driving many days to enjoy. You do not compare—you have no time. In a flash you have forgotten the Scottish mountains and your imagination is captured by the thought of what those English hill-sides conceal.

So you will come down from Carlisle first to Bothel, where you turn off to Bassenthwaite. Your map will tell you that, in the ordinary sense, there is no such thing as a tour of the lakes possible, that you must resign yourself to the frequent retracing of tracks, if you are to see more than

the main roads offer. At once you will discover that the word 'resign' is all wrong. For at the foot of Bassenthwaite you turn to the right and follow the road over Lorton Fells, wild, high, and showing you a matchless view of the lake. This, one of the finest hill-roads in the district,



brings you to Lorton and, by Lorton Vale, a crevice between sheer rocky flanks, to Crummock Water and Buttermere.

Here are the fells at their wildest, the lakes at their most exquisite. Is there anything more difficult to believe in than these two stretches of water on a summer evening? They are all emerald, black, and silver. You are on the only road there is for twelve miles west and south, and the

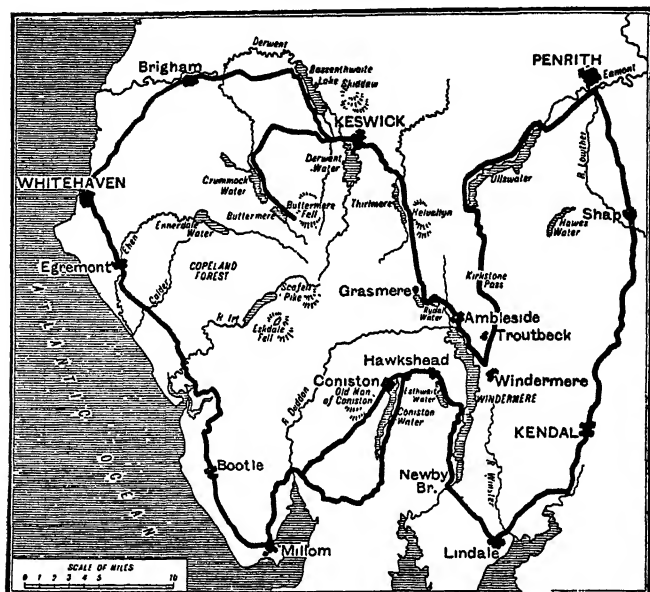
nearest to the east, by Derwent Water (if you except the by-way to Stair) is five miles away. You can go on past the tail of Buttermere to the foot of Honister Pass, a place of lonely grandeur, and halt till night has flowed down the sides of the valley and blotted out the last gleam on the lake's end. That hour you will long remember.

You will be wise to turn about and go back. It is possible to get over the top of the pass, but it is, at present, a matter of luck and difficult driving, owing to the appalling condition of the road. It is best looked upon as an end, and the fact that most people do so look upon it must save that incomparable corner of England from much destroying intrusion.

Back to a mile or two short of Cockermouth lies your way now, and from there down to Egremont and Bootle and Broughton, a superb drive between the hills and the sea. You can find another end by going off to Wast Water, and another by driving up Eskdale, but you must always come back the same way. What matter? Once in the fells you are an explorer, with all his responsibilities. From Broughton you cross to Lowick Bridge and go north up the side of Coniston Water, thence to Hawkshead, down to Newby Bridge, most perfect of all lake-ends, and up past Windermere to the high hills about Ullswater. This road takes you to the top of Kirkstone Pass, leaving out Ambleside, and the whole run, past Brother Water, Patterdale, along Ullswater, and over the moors to Troutbeck, is a sheer delight. You reach Bothel and Carlisle again by way of Keswick.

There are risks to be run and chances taken, but if you have a mind to see the best colours English scenery can show, you must arrange to go to the lakes before Midsummer Day. In early June England has no colours to compare with those she guards so jealously between Skiddaw

and Kendal, Penrith and Coniston Water. Jealously, with the grey rain. Those are the chances, the risks. You may travel the length and breadth of England to get a sight of those gleaming fells and blue waters, with the rhododendrons between, at the exact moment of their supreme glory, only to find them shuttered in mist. You may have to



wait days for the clouds to begin their leisurely march up the fell sides, but if you do, your reward will be beyond all appraisal.

When the first faint shy beam of sunlight slides apologetically, between showers, across the dull slate of Windermere, its tail ending in a rainbow, and touches one of those clumps of Pink Pearl that hang over the water's edge, under Thwaitehead, you will be suddenly presented with new knowledge. You will know that wet pink rhododendron

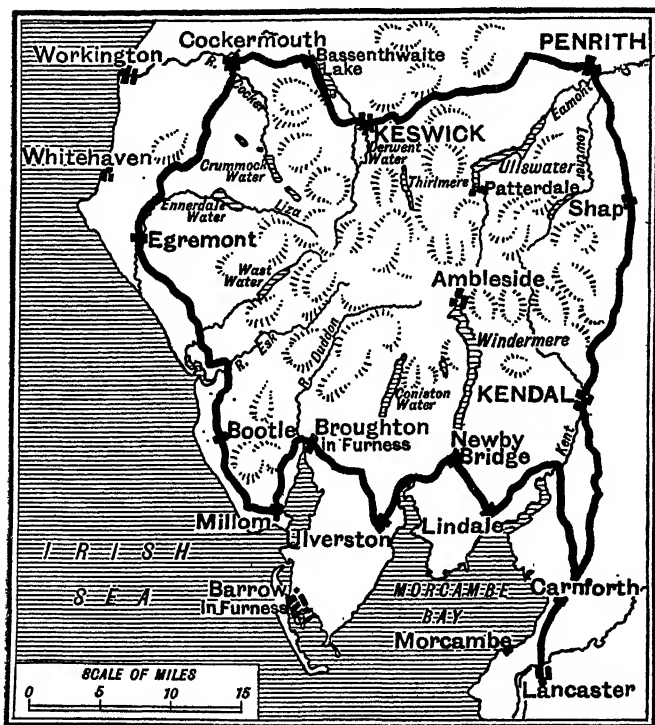
is both transparent and burning, that it gives out light like an unflawed ruby and that it has only one competitor. It is the incredible flower, ranking with the scarlet gold Mohur of the Nile.

It does not really matter much how you plan a cruise round the lakes so long as you include as many as possible. One or two of them have through roads on one side only, like Crummock Water, Wast Water, and part of the best one of all, Ullswater, but as retracing your wheel-tracks amongst the English lakes is quite as good as going to new places, you can have nothing to grumble at. The fells have a thousand faces, ten thousand shapes, which they show you as you make your way yard by yard. You never see the same thing twice in the same way.

It is difficult, it must be admitted, to keep off crowded roads throughout the cruise, but with a proper disregard of bad surface and narrow roads it may be done. I would begin by such a series of roads at Newby Bridge, at the foot of Windermere, for this is where you should come upon those rhododendrons in special beauty. Three miles from the bridge the road forks, the left-hand branch leading direct to Esthwaite Water, and the right-hand one keeping close to the water's edge and joining the Hawkshead road a mile from Esthwaite Water. I prefer the latter, from experience, but it is all a matter of luck. Your best plan is to do them both by turning back at the foot of the lake and starting again from Newby Bridge.

From Hawkshead, take the road down the east bank of Coniston Water, returning by Torver, and Coniston, and Yewdale to Ambleside. Here, and as far as Grasmere, you may be amongst crowds for a time, but it is impossible to reach the northern lakes any other way save by a very long detour to the west. Follow the main road up to Thirlmere, where again you have a choice of lake-side roads and, when you reach Keswick, turn south along the exquisite Derwent

Water down into Borrowdale. If you feel in the mood for mountaineering, keep on over the Honister Pass to Buttermere, and, following the road along Crummock, reach Cockermouth, and from there turn through Keswick



by the road alongside Bassenthwaite Lake. If Honister Pass should discourage you, you can turn along the west side of Derwent Water to Keswick.

From Keswick you take seriously to the hills, following that magnificent road through Threlkeld to Troutbeck station, where you turn south to Ullswater. On reaching the edge of this loveliest of lakes you should turn to the

left, and drive up to Pooley Bridge and as far down the other side as you feel inclined. You must return the way you came, but, as I said, that is if anything an advantage. Passing your Troutbeck road again, you keep round the bottom end of the lake to Patterdale, and then drive out into the immense moors which eventually sweep you up Kirkstone Pass, from the top of which is one of the most magnificent views in the British Isles. You will be wiser to take the Windermere descent from the top to the left, rather than the more famous and infinitely more uncomfortable drop to Ambleside on the right. The return to Newby Bridge alongside Windermere must not be counted as part of the cruise. There will be no avoiding crowds.

The whole cruise is about a hundred and forty miles in length, and although it can be done in a summer's day without real discomfort, it is wiser to allow another half-day for it, and so make sure of having enough time to linger over the scores of beautiful places. There are several hotels, one or two excellent, on the lakes themselves, and it is not necessary to spend the night in any town.

.

The wanderer by car is grateful to spring wherever he may be, but it is when, as a southerner, he is heading north that he has full cause to realize what a great part that little season plays in making his year at home perfect. When we have come nearly to the end of the matchless loveliness of the south in April and May, when we have seen for ourselves how much more beautiful are English thorn and may, gorse and apple and plum, than any flowering trees and shrubs anywhere else in the world, when we have discovered the precise meaning of the advice about casting clouts and know that it means that we must wait until the tree and not the month is out, we go two or three days' journey north, and find the curtain rising on the same

scene with a different setting. The blossom we left for good in Hampshire until another year is in its first glory in Northumberland, and, against that greyer background, even more gorgeous.

If we owed no other debt to the possession of our cars we could never settle that account, for we perform miracles. We cheat the sun and stay him in his course. The unforgiving days are halted while we start the living year afresh with a new spring. In these two months we have another chance, and, like the traveller round the world, we steal not a day but that most exquisite of all the wonders of the English year, another blossoming. We lengthen the year by a month just where we want to, and pay nothing for it.

If the weather is kind and you drive by instinct and not by calendar, by sight and not by time, you can make an English springtime last from the middle of April to June. You can take your car away from all your colourless worries and during a month or six weeks you can see the perfection of England and Scotland, mint new at every fifty miles. And when the spring is late your gain is all the greater, for the days are longer and the sun between your shoulders a gift of real worth. The price of a dragging winter is a trifle for a long, late spring.

First among the northern counties for a sight of another spring is Yorkshire and the moors lying open to the immense sky. Here you may find it still cold, but the light is the light which transforms a moss-grown rock into a jewel, a stretch of gorse into a carpet of gold. In the dales and on the heights everything is newly alive, not waking but awake, the air, a draught of health for every breath, clean as the Atlantic wind, clear as spring water. There will be nobody about except the curlews and the peewits and the sheep, and on certain roads, marked with no great confidence on the maps, they will pay you very little attention. This is their kingdom.

It does not matter at all where you start your spring drive in Yorkshire, so you may just as well make it York. Better, I should say, as the green levels that surround it make the best introduction to the best that is to come. On a tour of this sort there is only one excuse for going to Scarborough (or any other town, charming, no doubt, in other circumstances, but superfluous to a countryman), and that is the drive from there to Whitby, past Robin Hood's Bay. In high summer, of course, it is overrun with traffic, but about now it shows itself at its best, which is saying a good deal. It is one to remember.

You skirt the edge of the great North Moor all the way to Whitby and Guisborough, and only enter it when you turn south by Stokesley. I say enter it because, although you climb up over a shoulder to get to the Chop Gate, you are for the most part in Bilsdale, which brings you right down to Rievaulx Abbey. Hereabouts you will dawdle long and happily among the wooded hills round Helmsley. It is a singularly peaceful spot, and before you catch sight of the abbey you will have made the acquaintance of bird and beast unharried by humans.

Your next objective is Thirsk, and to get there you have the drop down Sutton Bank, a hill of formidable gradient and length. It is a well-made road, and, provided you have proper control of your car, there is nothing to disturb your peace of mind. The view from the top is superb, and on a fine day you get a sight across the often misty vale of the moors they call Langstrothdale Chase. Here, too, is a place for pause and grateful reflection. You must be able to see forty miles.

From Thirsk strike across country to Masham, crossing the Northallerton and Great North Roads at Carlton Miniott and Kirklington, and follow the road to Middleham and Leyburn, past Jervaulx Abbey. Keep straight on at Leyburn, that is to say, by the Bellerby road, taking the left-

hand road at Halfpenny House, and, a mile farther on, the right. This brings you to Swaledale, a mile short of Marske, and you turn westwards and follow it through Reeth to Muker. If you feel like adventure you can shorten this by going straight from Leyburn to Reeth, but it would be wise to make inquiries about the road first. It ranks, for condition, with the incomparable moorland track from Reeth to Barras—incomparable for solitude and endless views—which is to say that it may be rough.

Soon after Muker you turn to the left and climb over Abbotside Common by the famous Buttertubs Pass, a steep and stony road, as wild as you like, from which you see a limitless expanse of rolling moorland. I am not quite sure that the top of Buttertubs is not the finest place in England for an hour's rest. If there is a finer you will find it fifteen miles farther west, between Sedbergh and Kendal. You need only go half-way between the two to find that view over Morecambe Bay. It is more than worth it. Back to York your way lies through Kirkby Lonsdale and Settle, Skipton and Bolton Abbey, and over the moors to Greenhow Hill and Pateley Bridge. By the time you have reached Ripley, in the valley, you will have formed a fair notion of what Yorkshire can provide in the way of open country, wild life, and blessed solitude.





CHAPTER IV

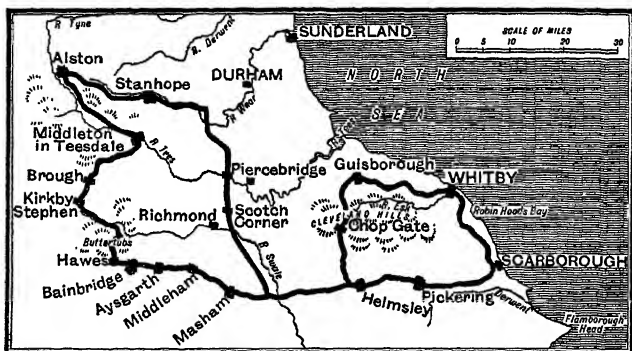
IN YORKSHIRE AND WESTMORLAND

To the lover of England there are very few places it is of such urgent importance to explore in a car as the country of the dales in early spring. It is, I admit, a chancy business for the southron to make his plans to spend a week-end between Scarborough and the Wall even in April. He may find the skies grey and the moors sullen under a belated east wind; he may even find his ways blocked by a last flurry of snow that gives less warning of its approach than is afforded by a cautious Air Ministry; he will more likely find serene weather and stream and hill-side alive with colour and light such as he must go very far west to discover. There is a risk of disappointment, but it is always one well worth taking. The drive up the Great North Road is matter only for a short day's run, and in any case the field for his wanderings is so wide that he would be extraordinarily unlucky to be forced to postpone them.

It is certainly not correct to say that nowhere in England is spring ever more beautiful than in Yorkshire and on its

borders, and yet it is often no more than bare justice. Things grow later up there, but the weeks before the full glory of the spring flowering is on the face of the land are often more satisfying even than in Devon or Dorset. If the seasons are not put out of joint by drought or any of the invariably extraordinary happenings that give its character to the English climate, you will find April a month of enchantment among the hills and dales.

It is a simple sort of magic that transforms a great range



of bleak hill-sides, windswept, almost treeless, into a place of sheer beauty. You have, of course, the everlasting grandeur of their outline, the austerity of their form, ridge behind greater ridge to the horizon's edge, an emptiness almost without rival. Only fog can spoil that, whatever the time of year. It is the new light that makes you rub your eyes and wonder why the whole picture seems strange. Colours glow in sunshine and shadow that you do not remember even in the magnificence of autumn, and lest these should not suffice you have the companionship of the wild things, particularly of the birds that always seem more contemptuous of mankind in Yorkshire than anywhere else.

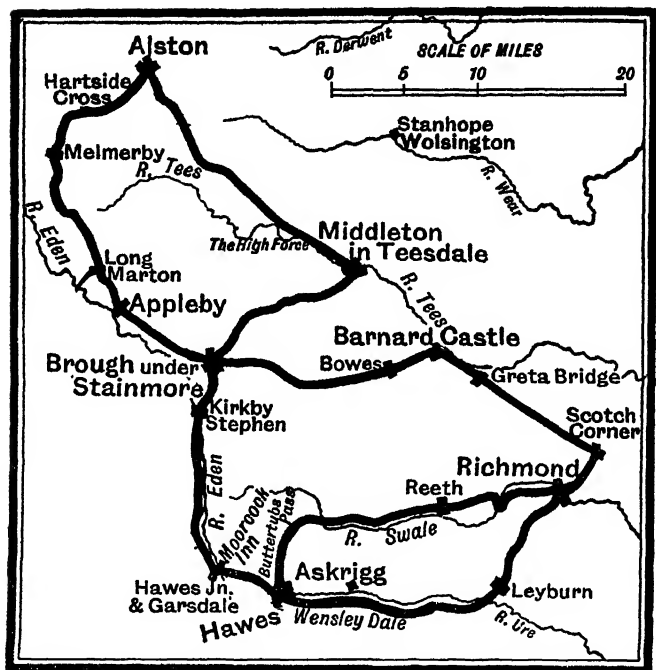
You do not trouble them even when you have the bad taste to stop and watch them.

Go up the Great North Road as far as the turning off to Thirsk, about twenty miles short of Scotch Corner, and take the way to Helmsley. It is one of the best approaches to the moors, for almost at once you are faced with the inspiring climb up Sutton Bank Hill, the southernmost gate to the Cleveland Hills. At the top you look back over Swaledale, and across it to the wild country you will soon be exploring. The road drops down to the levels after Helmsley, and at Pickering you have a choice of ways. The first, to the left, is over the moors to Chop Gate and Stokesley, the second, and the best if the weather is clear, is through Scarborough and along the fine road past Robin Hood's Bay to Whitby.

From this, one of the most attractive fishing headquarters in Great Britain, you turn westwards again to Guisborough, and come down past the Hambleton Hills to Rievaulx and Sutton Bank. You can cut across by way of Stokesley to Catterick Bridge, as I have shown on the map, but the circuit of the East Riding must be done if you are to have a real idea of the infinite variety of Yorkshire scenery. Back the other side of the Swale you come to Masham and Middleham, and follow the River Ure along that delightful valley that brings you, by choice of parallel roads, to Aysgarth, Askrigg, and Bainbridge to Hawes.

And here is serious climbing for you. Buttertubs Pass must be crossed to reach Muker and the road to the north, and it is still a very respectable hill even for modern engines, with a drop down the other side even more to be respected by brakes ancient and modern. A road of real moorland character takes you on to Kirkby Stephen and up to Brough, and another, about whose condition you should make inquiries beforehand, over the high places to Middleton-in-Teesdale.

The next twenty miles to Alston are along one of the finest high roads in the kingdom, and from every one of them, but particularly from the last five, you will get such views as will repay you for many hundreds of miles of travel to reach them. It is all superb country hereabouts, and the



air is health itself. You are high up, at one point not far short of two thousand feet above the sea, and you find that razor edge to every breath you draw that slices the years off age and reduces the blackest of troubles to insignificance. I rank the Alston-Middleton road equal with that marvel that runs over the Cheviots by Carter Bar.

Elsewhere. I have outlined a cruise taken in the outskirts of the northern moors which stretch, an expanse of sweeping billows, of heather and gorse, between Harrogate and Carlisle. It is intended merely as an introduction to better things, a preliminary and superficial tour of inspection before undertaking the adventure of the proper exploration of that ideal country for a week-end drive in the height of summer. Here I hope to show those who find the chief joy of car ownership in wandering, if not aimlessly at least at the single call of the passing mood, among the solitary places of the hills, how to reach and explore what is some of the best empty country in England.

Although it is, first and foremost, a run over and among notable hills, the route can be confidently undertaken by those who, whether from lack of experience or evil teaching, hold the heretical belief that climbing is merely a necessary evil and not, as it is, the essence of happy driving. With one exception, all the roads have an excellent surface, and with one exception all the hills are easy in gradient and safe, and the last can be left out if need be without inconvenience.

Scotch Corner, where the Great North Road branches right to Darlington and Newcastle, makes a good point of departure and return for the straggling figure-of-eight you have to trace, especially for a Londoner and his neighbours, as the 230 odd miles make a comfortable first day's run, and there are several tolerable hotels within easy reach of it. The day begins with the restful run to Bowes and Brough, against a steady gradient all the way. Although it is the main road to Carlisle, Edinburgh and Glasgow and the rest of Scotland, I have seldom met much traffic on it. In the early morning it is usually very pleasantly empty, and you have all the leisure you want to begin your grateful appreciation of real open country after the closeness and the smudged air of the last hundred flat miles of the Great North Road.

You follow the Penrith road beyond Brough as far as

Appleby, where you bear to the right at the end of the town under the railway bridge and take the by-road to Long Marton and Milburn. This is very twisting and you should drive cautiously. From Long Marton onwards you get a series of views of Cross Fell and Knapside on your right, two notable heights which on any but a diamond-clear day look far more impressive than they really are, and as you approach Melmerby and the main Alston road and catch your first glimpse of the pass you have to climb over Hartside, you feel yourself among proper mountains.

At Melmerby you turn to the right and find yourself at the beginning of the climb. For five glorious miles the perfect road sweeps and winds up through intoxicating air to the summit, at over seventeen hundred feet up. There are hairpin bends and straights and easy curves, and every moment a new and greater view bursts upon you. It will take you a long time to get to the top as you will be compelled to stop very often, for fear of missing those behind you. Keep a look out for coaches on the blind corners. One of these cut a corner on the wrong side and forced a car which was following me on to the parapet. It is a necessary crime to blow the horn effectively among those splendid solitudes.

After Alston comes another gorgeous run over very high places to Middleton-in-Teesdale, and, four miles short of the town, the High Force waterfall, which must not be passed by. The Tees tumbles riotously over a big bluff into a miniature canyon and, looked at in the proper spirit, becomes an associate of Niagara and the Victoria Falls. It is an exquisite place which will lead to much delay. The water is of the clear, deep brown which tells so exciting a story to dwellers in the plains and by the side of sluggish streams. It is the least tamed of show-places.

A mile beyond Middleton, turn to the right and cross Lune Moor down to Brough. Somewhere near a place

called Nettlepot stop and look out to your left, where lies what must be one of the widest views in England. There is a whale-backed hill on the farthest edge of the view which must be fifty miles away—or so it seemed to me on a clear day.

At Brough comes the turning-point, the centre of your figure-of-eight, and the homeward stretch begins with the lovely run down the valley of the Eden, by Kirkby Stephen, to Hawes station. You turn to the left at the Moorcock and take the road along the Ure as far as Yorebridge. If you have the right views on the matter you will turn to the left here and climb Buttertubs Pass. It is steep, and much of it is stony, but your reward at the top pays for all. If you do this you finish the cruise along incomparable Swaledale to Reeth and Richmond; if you are more discreet than valorous you get to Richmond by Wensleydale and Leyburn.

.

A friendly reader of some notes I wrote last year on two ways to Scotland avoiding the Great North Road, asked me for a detour through the north country so planned that he could take it from either the western or the eastern of the two roads I sketched out. He was fired with the ambition to climb as high as possible on to the moors between Leeds and the Wall, and, presumably owning an active car, positively demanded steep hills.

He had a glorious prospect before him. Only when they are drowned in snow or blotted out in fog are the moors of Durham, Yorkshire, Cumberland, and Westmorland anything but places of real peace and beauty of a very specially English kind. It may be blisteringly hot or as cold as you please (and it can be both at the proper time to a degree incredible to the southron); it may blow a hurricane, and for days on end there may not be enough stir in the air to blow out a candle; the sun may blaze down on the heather as if it were growing a couple of thousand miles farther south,

as resplendently in the silver light of winter as in high summer; whole days may pass under a sky of grey. The moors have a thousand moods.

They have the Yorkshire quality of vigour at all seasons, though in September, towards the end of the perfect month, you will sometimes catch them in reflective mood. Anywhere else you would say, confronted with those wide expanses of heathery hill and dale and those far horizons, that the September softness had fallen upon them, but as you stare into those distances and foregrounds that fill you with so satisfying a sense of space, you see that softness is not the word. The outlines of the fells may not seem so sharp-cut as they were when you saw them in June or March. There may be, as there is over the hills of the south, a little haze about their bold heads and flanks, but it is not of the sort that softens. It is translucent, and through it you still see the forthright architecture of the wildest hills in England.

Yet I believe the moors are at their best in autumn—though I have little doubt I should deny it in May. Certainly their colouring is unsurpassed, glowing with deeper fire day after day, until the inevitable change and storm, when winter begins to stretch her pale fingers over the North Sea and everything is frozen into the colours of a shadow. Go in early autumn, before the east winds and the slanting rain make the pilgrimage too dubious. If you find only a couple of proper September days, copper and silver over the heather and the little beck and the bigger rivers, you will have seen something worth while. Look on your map for the Swale and the Esk, the Tees and the Wear, for the Cleveland Hills, and for the fells that stand sentry on the Border, and let your car find her way without thought of time or season.

It does not matter where you start on this best of all autumn tours, so I choose Kendal. Instead of going straight

on, take the road to Windermere, and soon after turn off to the right up Kirkstone Pass. It is the easier of the two ways to the top, and the scenery is just as fine as on the other. At the top look back over Lake Windermere and forward towards Ullswater and the Solway Firth. That is only a foretaste of the views awaiting you.

It is a beautiful run through Patterdale and along the north shore of Ullswater (which I certainly regard as the loveliest of the bigger lakes), but there is just as good to



come. The road to Alston from Penrith is one of the finest in the kingdom, climbing high over the hills, sweeping round their curves, magnificently made. You realize that you are in the country of big ideas, where space is the first consideration. At Alston turn eastward, but keep to the left after crossing the new-born Tyne and follow the road over the moors through St. John's Chapel to Stanhope and Crook. You climb high hereabouts and live perpetually in the air that is health and peace itself. It will be impossible to drive fast.

Just short of Crook take the road to the right, which brings you down through the only suggestion on the whole run of man and his ugly works to Barnard Castle, and then find the way to Richmond and Swaledale. Turn west

again for Reeth, along the river, and at Muker you will find on your left the road over Buttertubs Pass to Wensleydale.

At the bottom is Hawes and the friendly road beside the river to Bainbridge and Leyburn, where you come down into the vale which divides the North Riding as the Channel divides England from France. Presently you come to Northallerton, wearing a little of the bleak northern look, and you skirt the Cleveland Hills round by Guisborough to Whitby and Hackness, just avoiding Scarborough. If you prefer it, turn off at Stokesley and cross the hills by Chop Gate to Helmsley, coming down past Rievaulx Abbey, and then turn west again down Sutton Bank.

The last steep hill on the way to Kendal is between Pateley Bridge and Grassington, and the views from the top are of the same high order as all the others. Come down from there to Bolton Abbey and Bridge and then turn for the last time westwards, following the road through Skipton and Settle to Kirkby Lonsdale and Kendal.

.

It was on a day of great cold, of bitter but still air, when every twig of every tree stood out sharply in a film of dazzling white, every hedge was crowned with a veil of gleaming ice, each leaf of the evergreens edged with a perfect pattern, when the extraordinary silence which only ten degrees of frost can impose on landscape and life alike had come down and spread over the country like the expectation of great events. It was on just such a day that it seemed inevitable that one should turn away for a time from the by-ways and follow the roads which carry the swift travellers from end to end of the kingdom.

There was no snow, but the road ran almost white under one's wheels, sometimes straight as an arrow, sometimes curving away right and left, always visible for miles ahead,

marked out by the featureless hedges and the great telegraph poles, black as ink against the sky, playing for a time the part of the cypresses on the long straight roads near the mouth of the Rhône. Every now and then we stopped to listen, convinced either that the car, usually barely audible, had developed unguessed-at maladies of noise, or that England was at last dead. And then the strange silence would be broken by the creaking of a farm cart's wheels, a quarter of a mile away, the ghostly whistle of an unseen train, or the subdued hum of an approaching car. Of the life of birds or anything else there was neither sign nor sound.

It was on the way from Woodstock to Northampton that it seemed absurd to waste such a day in mere work. So we turned off and made straight for the Great North Road and the roads which run companion to it, north and east. Pick another such day and, abandoning for once the inexhaustible joy of exploring the less obvious roads, do as we did and find out the real delight of the main roads to which we all give so wide a berth on every other sort of day. I have little to say for the Great North Road since the night lorries took possession of it, but when steadfast frost wraps the land in that marvellous silence it gives you one of the finest drives you can imagine.

Nowadays it begins at Stevenage, and once you are past Baldock you face a superb, lonely highway that stretches with scarcely a break to the Border. It may not really be lonely, as the heavy traffic must still be there, but there are so few fast travellers and they and everything you meet stand out so sharply on the tremendous road that you feel it is all your own.

Under such a sky, every sense of perception tingling under the keen air, you realize how beautiful some of the towns are as you approach them along that imperial artery. Stamford, next only to Oxford in ancient dignity and beauty;

Grantham, with its old inns, looking for once as they must have looked to the stage coach travellers a century ago; Newark, with its castle, which not one in a thousand of the August crowd, hurrying up to their shooting, ever notices; even Doncaster, characterless in mild weather, hideous in wet, all borrow beauty or charm from the frost, or add to what they have.

So much you will gain as the milestones fly past, and it is a great deal, but even on the sort of day when the Great North Road shows itself at its best, you must mix a little caution with your enthusiasm. You must remember Lincoln, that city on a hill where no hills are, whose cathedral dwarfs it almost as the cathedral of Le Puy dominates the city crowding about the rock on which it stands, thrusting its great towers into the wide skies. Turn off at Newark and follow the Foss Way till you come to the capital of that most desolate of counties.

Then go north along the Ermine Street (according to the map, I make haste to remark) till you come to Caenby Corner and then turn back by Gainsborough, reaching the Great North Road at either East Retford or Bawtry—preferably the latter, as not even a clean winter's day can do much for East Retford.

Not to waste an hour of the weather you should, properly speaking, regard Catterick Bridge as your turning-point for a two-day run, and your way there lies through York, not the direct way but the best, as the Great North Road passes through an ugly phase of industry between Doncaster and Wetherby, and it is best left alone. Go then to York and Selby, and then feel your car come alive under your hands as she swallows up the miles to Boroughbridge. At the end of a day you will never forget, you come to Catterick Bridge for the night and sleep as you have never slept before to the music of the River Swale.

Your way home is the same as far as Newark, where, if

you want a change of scene, you can take the road past Bingham to Melton Mowbray and Oakham, down to the west through Market Harborough and Rugby and Towcester, comfortable in the thought that you are choosing the right sort of weather for the Shires. There will be no hunt for you to spoil. You will see no gleam of pink, no glow of tan and black and white, hear none of the music which sends the blood racing through you—but the regrets will be yours alone and wholly selfish.

.

■

PART III
SCOTLAND

■



CHAPTER V

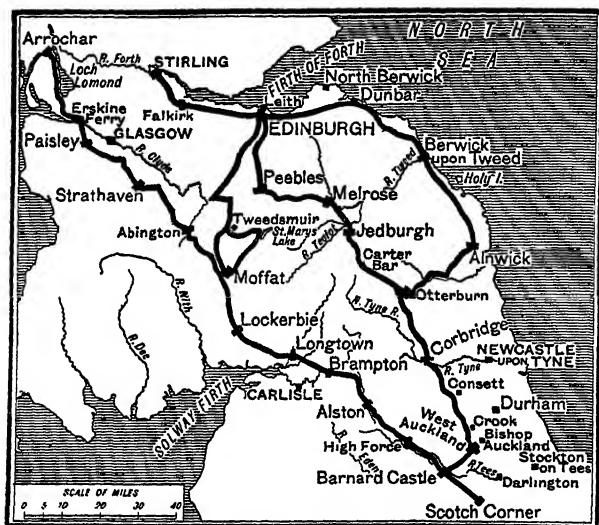
THE LOWLANDS AND THE WAY THERE

FROM SCOTCH CORNER

HE was a traveller who gave such a name to an unassuming fork in a great highway. It may have been tradition or a surveyor, or whoever it is whose job it is to name unidentified places on the map, but no matter how old he may be, as tradition, or how modern, as a surveyor, Scotch Corner betrays him for a wayfarer and an artist. It is certain that he was not born north of the Border, else he had written it Scots, yet he must be forgiven for the lapse. Scotch Corner rings well in your ears when you have passed through the prim Midlands by Newark and Bawtry, skirted the fringe of the coal country by Pontefract and Ferry Bridge, and arrived, after the swift run from Wetherby to Catterick Bridge, on the Swale, at that small dot on the map which marks the parting of the ways.

You can go either east, west, or north—roughly speaking—and find Scotland at the end of the road. You can go by highways or by-ways, but unless you stray badly at the

outset and fall upon Stockton-on-Tees or Newcastle, well off the map, you must come to the Border, and by open country. It is where the Great North Road really expires. It is officially still alive, I believe, at Berwick-on-Tweed and even farther north, but nobody remembers it after Scotch Corner. Ahead lie the blue and grey hills, the rivers, and the great moorlands where winds blow which



have yet to have the life taken out of them by grime and dankness.

It would be easy to put one way to Edinburgh or Glasgow before another, and still easier to revise the order. For each is the best as you meet it. Fresh from those invigorating high places, I am less inclined to point out the best way to Scotland than to persuade you to make a round tour of the Border roads. It may be true that your main aim is to get north, but you will have to come back along one or other of the three, and if you have clear weather it is better to

take the best of it—a sound rule at most times of the year in Scotland and its nearer neighbours. In any case Edinburgh or Glasgow lies at the farther end of the cruise, and you can always break off there and continue your ordained journey.

Beginning, then, at Scotch Corner, you follow the right-hand road to Darlington as far as Kneeton Hall, and there bear to the left along the Roman road through Piercebridge to St. Helens Auckland. Hereabouts you will find something of a confusion of roads, and the native is likely to offer you well-meant but unexpected directions. Your next objective, which you must bear firmly in mind, is Tow Law, which is reached by either Willington or Crook or the right way, by Howden-le-Wear, according to the preference of the particular native you consult. So long as you get there, and eventually near Consett, you are safe.

You are in the country of rolling moor, resplendent just now with gorse, and a few miles after you have left Auckland you are well up on the skyline, a good thousand feet above the sea. Here and there are towns with their smoke, but they keep at a proper distance from you, and if the sun is shining over the faint silver mist which sometimes clings about the folds of the hills, at least one of them looks as if it stood on the edge of a canyon of white marble. There is a scarp, I suppose of mine refuse, which lends itself very conveniently to the illusion. You leave Consett on your right—perhaps it is this that has that scarp—and eventually come down to the Tyne at Riding Mill through a path of larch, hazel, fir, and gorse, leaving behind you one of the most beautiful moorland roads in England.

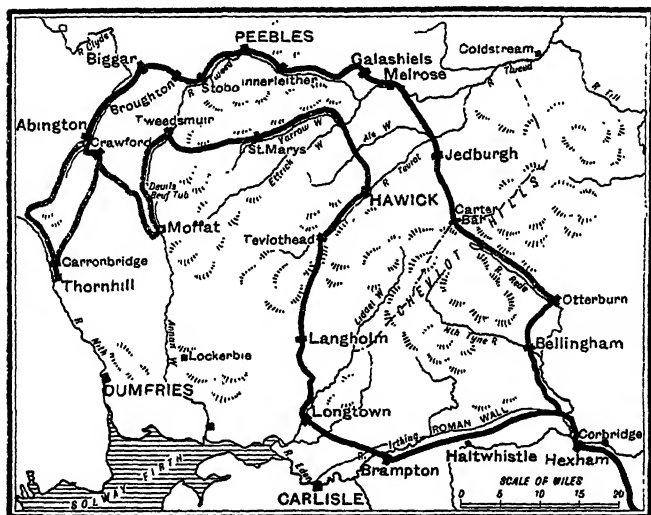
Another as fine awaits you on the other side of the river. The run up from Corbridge to Carter Bar is really unsurpassed. For thirty-six miles that magnificent road swings up and over the huge empty spaces of Northumberland, as lonely a highway as you will find anywhere. You drive

past hundreds of unheeding sheep, whose progeny lie dozing in the road, not even at the bother of twitching an ear as your tyres crackle past them. Their conduct, compared with that of their supposedly more sophisticated brothers in the far south, is beyond all praise. Their calm is symbolical of the place, a vast windswept summit, where nothing so insignificant as a motor car is worth the vaguest of glances.

Down through the high timber and the red cliffs into Jedburgh the road runs very pleasantly, and on to Melrose, through what might be a succession of English parks, ending with the exquisite drive along the green valley of the Tweed to Peebles, and so up the high road to Edinburgh and Stirling, where the other part of Scotland begins. This is the road I like best, and so is the other. I mean the way through Barnard Castle along Teesdale, past High Force, and up to Ashgill, where you are nearly as high above the sea as on the Spittal of Glenshee. It is the western way, and on its day it is very nearly as fine as Carter Bar—perhaps finer, you will think. You go down through Alston, wary of the steep hills, and Brampton and Longtown, and come out on to that other splendid highway which takes you to either Edinburgh or Glasgow by Moffat.

You have the Devil's Beef-Tub for a heartening climb on your way to Peebles if you follow the main road, but you will be tempted to turn off to Tibbie Shiels and St. Mary's Loch, rejoining the Tweedside road at Tweedsmuir. You must do both, so arranging your going and your coming that you miss neither. If you are for the Western Highlands you can avoid Glasgow very comfortably by going to Strathaven and Paisley, and crossing the Clyde by the Erskine Ferry, a convenient and, at ninepence, an economical saving of time and trouble. Paisley and its surroundings are not beautiful, but they are definitely to be preferred to the drive from Hamilton through Glasgow to the Clydeside.

Lastly, you have the north-eastern way, along the North-umberland and Berwick coast. It does not compare with the inland routes, but between Alnwick, which you reach across country from the Carter Bar road, and Berwick and Dunbar it has a grim austerity, a far outlook over the grey North Sea, which a southron must appreciate. It ranks



third, but it is an indispensable member of the three roads to Scotland.

All those uplands that lie south of the Lammermuirs, between the North Sea and the hills of Ayrshire and Lanarkshire, and between the Clyde, Tweed, and Teviot, have had for the southerner, at least since *Weir of Hermiston* was printed, a fascination few other parts of Scotland can rival. Is there a strain of pirate blood in us, or of cattle-rustlers, that the undoubtedly vulgar exploits of the Elliots among those lonely hills should make us feel almost at home there?

It may, of course, be a gross libel on a highly respectable section of Scottish county society; their activities may have been perfectly legitimate and the tales told of their skill in moving herds mere jealousy. They may not even be true; for there is no libel like history. The fact remains that when you get up among those rivers and hills, only a little away from the roads that lead to Glasgow and Edinburgh; or eastwards, along that terrific coast-road that runs high above the coast itself, you begin to think sympathetically of cattle-raiding and of piracy.

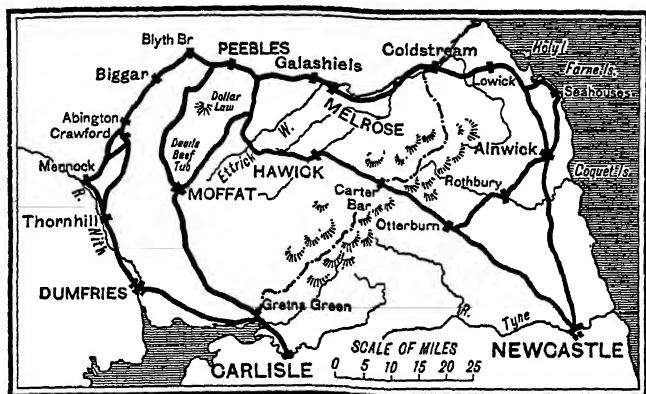
The piracy—the sea-end of the business—is not so clearly derived. Pirates no doubt found their way years ago to those cold grey beaches, but it is really the Norse fleets who gave the Romans so much trouble that are in your mind. They were no pirates, but enemy squadrons conforming in every respect to the existing conventions of warfare. It is no matter. What is certain is that you cannot carry out a tour through that romantic country without seeing at once what superb opportunities it offers for freebooting.

It is a glorious cruise you make of it, a perfect plan for a long week-end. In winter you must indeed allow two full days for the actual exploring of the country, apart from the time necessary for reaching it. For the Scot it begins anywhere between Biggar and Melrose, for the southerner at either Carlisle or Newcastle-on-Tyne. If you are starting from London and returning there you must take four or five days over it.

Like most parts of England, it is country that insists upon a light touch on the throttle. It is a crime to drive any way but leisurely. Here and there you will come across a few miles where there is no harm in saving time for better things, but as a rule you will find that you cannot reckon on an average speed of more than twenty miles an hour if you are to see all there is to be seen. As is clear from the map, there are a number of ways of beginning

the tour from Carlisle, but to my mind there is one better than the rest. Go straight to Annan, along that swift road to Dumfries, and then follow the valley of the Nith past Thornhill to Menock, on the west side of one of the most picturesque groups of hills in Scotland.

Take the road to the right here, and climb up where the road forks above Wanlockhead, and then make your choice. The right-hand road takes you to Elvanfoot and Crawford, the left-hand to Abington. I prefer the latter myself for



its astonishing wildness and the impression it manages to convey of great height. There is another, bringing you to Elvanfoot, which starts from Carronbridge, just above Thornhill, but I have not yet explored it. Those few miles of roads climbing between narrow clefts in the rocky hills will be one of the pleasantest surprises in a tour richly packed with the unexpected—particularly if you happen, as I did, to reach their beginning through the squalor of Cumnock and Sanquhar.

At Abington you meet the Clyde and keep close to it nearly as far as Biggar, where you turn eastwards to find the Tweed at Peebles. That is a royal river and you see

it finely nearly all the way along the road by Innerleithen and Melrose to Coldstream. In my presuming view it is a greater than either the Dee or the Spey. It is nobler, its sweeping curves more in the grand manner, far less pestered by mankind. It lends dignity to its towns, but owes nothing to them of its picturesqueness—not even at Peebles or Melrose. You leave it with respectful regret at Coldstream to fulfil its end at Berwick and turn off yourself for that wonderful high road to Alnwick from which you look out over the cold sea and its black islets.

At Belford you will find a road that takes you to the actual coast at Bamburgh Castle and you can follow the beach to Sea Houses and Beadnell, but if the day is clear, I say you had better stick to the highway. That stretch to Alnwick is superb and, you must agree, the pirates' sea is often too grim to be attractive. It is very grey indeed and the coldest thing I know to look at. From Alnwick you climb up on to the moor and find your way across country to the Edinburgh road. If you keep to the left at Rothbury you meet it lower down and have the advantage of passing two delightfully-named places—Scots' Gap and Cambo. Scots' Gap is understandable and extremely suitable, at twenty-odd miles from the Border. It was doubtless handy at times. But what do you make of Cambo? The only one I knew before is the once peaceful village in the Basque country.

Then comes that splendid climb into Scotland again, the long swinging drop down from Carter Bar into Hawick and the entry into the raiders' country by Tushie Law, Tibbie Shiels, and St. Mary's Loch, where your rivers are Ettrick Water and Yarrow, your company the empty hills and the wild creatures. It does not matter where you wander now, provided you do not turn homeward until you have seen it all. There is no country in the least like it anywhere else.

You can come south again to Moffat either by the

eastern road or by the more familiar one on the west from Peebles and Stobo, past Dollar Law, which follows the Tweed for a while before carrying you up on to the Devil's Beef-Tub, whence you look out upon many miles of the Border country.

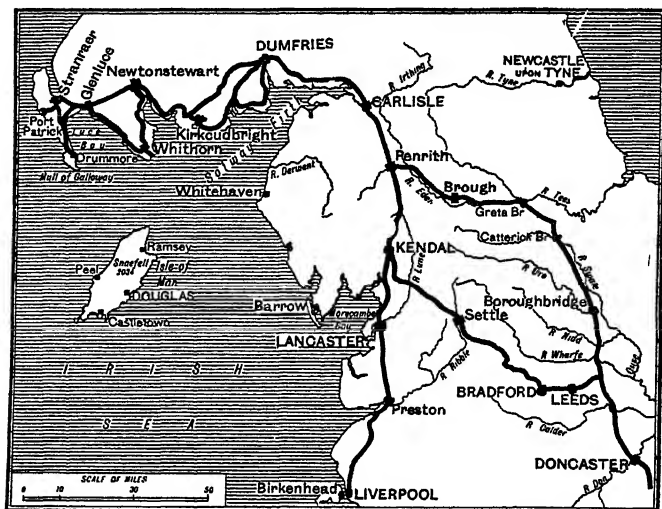
.

They talk again this year of turning the Highlands, or at least, the eastern parts, into a home-grown, rush-produced Switzerland, of ski-ing and lugeing and other alluring gaieties of the kind one usually looks for in the Alps or other places several thousand feet above the sea. Jazz bands were hired last year and will, I suppose, be part of the campaign again, and in remote inns, buried in the hills above the Dee, plans will be made for unflinching enjoyment. If all one hears is true and if next winter is obliging enough to be what is called old-fashioned, travellers by road up that way may experience much the same sensations as were Tartarin's when he found a ball in progress on the top of what he hoped was the Matterhorn. (Or was it Mont Blanc? Or another? It is beyond pardon to misquote even the minor classics, but I have lost my copy.) The chief one, if I remember right, was astonishment.

It all sounds extremely attractive, although I have so far looked in vain for any reference to the national winter sport of curling. The only thing that troubles me is that if there is snow enough for ski-ing, there will be a great deal too much for getting there or anywhere else by road. Your loss must be the other fellow's gain, and if you would hurtle over the sparkling slopes of the Grampians you must take the train from Euston instead of the Great North Road.

For myself I make no fashionable pretence that I am the better for snow, physically or spiritually, either in Scotland, the Alps, or anywhere else, and I would rather plan my northern winter motor runs in places where one can be

reasonably sure there will be no more than a passing flurry, just enough to remind you of the vivid imagination of the designers of Christmas cards. A place, for example, within touch of the Gulf Stream where the climate is what used to be called relaxing by our fussy but remarkably tough grandparents, where you look south over a sheltered sea, with plenty of hills between you and the north and the east.



You do not have to go far for it. With perhaps less confidence in British weather than most, I am always willing to risk that drive to the south coast of Scotland, the string of bays, each deeply indented, all screened by the Ayrshire hills, that lies between Annan and Port Patrick. Most of it is really the northern edge of the Solway Firth, and if you are of that hardy temperament that makes no account of cold and dark you can reach the outskirts of it in a single day's drive from London—a matter of three hundred and fifty miles or so. This is not the way to do it, of course,

unless you are in a hurry, for even if you start in the first of the daylight, you are bound to be benighted over the best of the run—between Scotch Corner and Carlisle. I assume you are not of that curious brotherhood that takes pride, if not exactly pleasure, in beating express trains; that you will let the Flying Scotsman go without a pang.

The proper way to do it is to take two days over it, the first a long one, and the second a short one. The Great North Road is admittedly at its very best in winter, particularly on a day of white frost, but its attraction lies in itself and not in the country it traverses. Despite express services of lorries, that leave goods trains nowhere, and of coaches that maintain an average speed which would have been remarkable in a good touring-car five years ago, in winter it retains nearly all its ancient romance. When the trees are leafless and the hedges gaunt and black, you follow it with a zest you lack in summer. It is so very direct and uncompromising, so sure of itself, so established. It is history.

But until you are well past Doncaster and between the East and West Ridings (what a superb name for a piece of country!) you can only take pleasure in the road itself and one or two towns, for between Baldock and Boroughbridge lies the only part of all England that can at times be dull. I have seen it glorious at sunrise on a summer's day, even between Grantham and Retford, but it is not to be depended on. It lies low and much cold, grey rain falls on it. Expect little of the scenery until you are starting away next day from the Swale at Catterick Bridge.

It is a wonderful run, that from Greta Bridge to Penrith, through Brough and Appleby, one of the best in Great Britain. It is forty miles long, and though you cover it in an hour or so—it is hard work keeping a light toe on the accelerator on that perfect surface and high up among those vast solitudes—you remember every mile of it. I am not

ashamed to confess that my most vivid memory of that road is of the time when my car went fastest. If you drive a car in which you are as much at ease at eighty miles an hour as in your own arm-chair, you find that your powers of observation are magically increased. You miss nothing of the sharp features of the moors, though you be deaf from the wind's rush. My picture of that road at eighty miles an hour—for a little while—is richer far in detail than the many, many others at twenty-five.

And so, through Carlisle, over the Border to Dumfries, and, in the afternoon light, down on to the sea coast. The road you have come three hundred and fifty miles to see is not long, but you will hardly complain. It runs south and west to Kirkcudbright, west again to Gatehouse of Fleet and all round Wigtown Bay, very close to that sea, which should be wearing a southern look, and, in the morning light, when you have all the day for your own, down to the Mull of Galloway and back to Port Patrick. It may be that you will be advised not to take all these little sea-roads, perhaps because they want mending, or for some other reason. It does not matter. From the main road itself, between Stranraer and Newton Stewart, Gatehouse and Castle Douglas, you will look out over a sheltered sea towards Snaefell, in the Isle of Man, and Skiddaw in the Fells. There may be snow on the hills, but if the sun is shining it will for once serve a useful purpose. It will stain that sea a deeper blue.



CHAPTER VI

THE WEST COAST—GLENS AND ISLANDS—SKYE— ARGYLLSHIRE

THOSE happy folk who are taking their cars to the West Coast of Scotland this summer will be even luckier than they can ever hope to be—and it is plain that nobody can set out for that enchanted coast without hope in its most extravagant form. For, in addition to the infinitely various beauty they will see along the roads that run between the most romantic islands in the world, they will be able to reach almost any chosen glen, loch, or famous outlook with ease and in comfort such as we have waited for these many years. They have done and are still doing rather wonderful things in building new roads and repairing old ones, and it can fairly be said that they are well on the way to making Scotland as a whole an almost ideal holiday place for Everyman and his car.

Time was, and not so very long ago, when only those with powerful and heavy cars were advised to explore any of the roads that lie off the main routes to Inverness, unless they disregarded primitive surfaces and the resultant effect

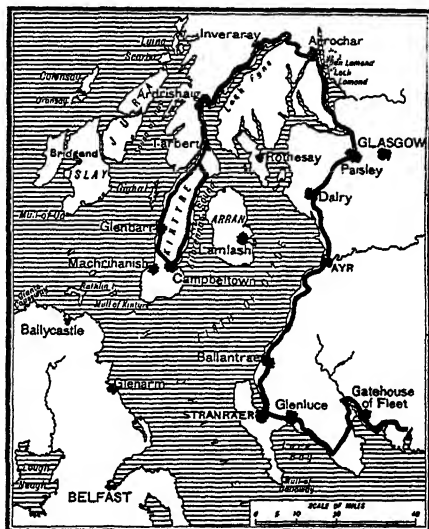
on tyres and petrol consumption, to say nothing of human endurance. Only a few years ago I remember, very painfully, explorations I undertook in a small car in the west, explorations which led to little but the conviction that it was no place for any but the hardest motorist, with the least feeling for his suffering car. To-day, with very few exceptions, you can go anywhere in comfort and safety.

On some of the by-ways that take you to the edge of the Atlantic west and north you must be prepared to be cautious, the way being narrow and the bends to be treated with respect, but since time, as a factor to be regarded, ceases to exist once you are across the Clyde, it does not matter at all. Not all the old roads are yet brand-new and in some places the admirable activities of the roadmakers call for specially cautious driving for several miles at a time, but you are always well warned.

Coming from the south, take the way I followed last year, and cross the Border at Gretna Green, turning westwards for Dumfries and the lovely road that runs above the Solway Firth to Stranraer. It is my belief that here begin the tropics of the British Isles. All the way west and north, past Gatehouse of Fleet and Luce Bay, up that coast-road that shows you the Firth of Clyde, to Ayr and, after the mildly urban surroundings of Paisley, across the Clyde by the Erskine Ferry (whereby you avoid Glasgow and its approaches) and round to the Mull of Kintyre it always seems to me to be real summer-time. I do not know if the Gulf Stream fills those firths and lochs and sounds, but it is quite certain that there is no gentler climate, no air softer nor more lively, no sunshine more real anywhere north of the Channel.

So you come soon to Loch Lomond, which is not so much a loch as the most beautiful water-garden in the world. The road runs past scenery which, after a day or two farther west, you will regard as civilized, in spite of the

towering bulk of Ben Lomond on one side and the glimpses you get on the other of the jagged heads above Glen Croe, but you cannot deny that it is supremely well done. Of its kind there is nothing more beautiful than Lomond. And, that nothing should be missing, it was here that I first saw the gorse and broom which last year coloured the western hill-sides with fire. I have never before seen gorse blooming by the acre, in spreading floods of gold.



At Arrochar you turn aside for Glen Croe, and begin that long climb between the black and green hills which takes you up Rest and Be Thankful. It is a wonderful place, better, I think, than Glen Croe, better even than the Spittal of Glenshee. At all events, make your plans to get here in the evening, when the colours and scents are at their best. Make it a rule now, that you do the best of the day's drive before noon and after six o'clock. These are the enchanted hours on the west coast.

And, after a space, you come down to the head of Loch Fyne and along its eastern edge to Inverary, that oddly Basque-looking village, with its white walls pierced by high arches. I never saw it look so foreign before, under that strong late evening light, and when I came across an old print of it, called 'Invero', I fell to wondering what, if anything, shipwrecked mariners of the Spanish Armada had to do with it. Nothing, probably, but it is in this part of Scotland that you dream dreams.

You strike south now, along Fyne to Lochgilphead and Arishaig and Tarbert, on your way to Campbelltown and the Mull of Kintyre. It is a perfect drive, 'twixt the Atlantic and hills of fern and gorse and firs, lightened at every mile by rhododendrons and bluebells. On a rock in the middle of a diamond-clear pool, under a cloudless sky, we lunched in the company of three cormorants, a family of wild sheldrake, five eider-duck, and a few free-lance oyster-catchers. None of them were farther away than a hundred yards. Behind us, on shore, a cuckoo and a cock pheasant uttered their witless and superfluous warnings. The sheldrake inspected us and forgot us, while the cormorants obviously wondered whether tinned sardines were as good as fresh. We were all the best of friends.

At noon the wind changed, and as by sorcery there appeared Gigha, Jura, and Islay, the last of the Western Isles, rising out of the silver sea from places where no islands had been a moment before. It is a road never to be forgotten.

.

Touring in Scotland has one supreme advantage which is generally regarded elsewhere as a drawback. If you want to see everything you cannot do so either in one unbroken tour or in a series of short ones without covering part of the ground at least twice. Through roads are comparatively

few and try as you may—if you are so foolishly disposed—you will only be able to map out a single tour of the idyllic country which lies between the islands and, say, Perth, if you are prepared to miss a great deal that must in no circumstances be missed. In a mountainous country this is an obvious gain, for every hill-road has at the least two faces and while you are retracing in the evening the way you took in the morning you are really driving over a new road. Cruising in almost any direction in Scotland means that you get at the very least twice as much out of every mile as you do anywhere else—and that is not counting the extra pictures you get from the same subjects in the early morning, at high noon, and in the glory of the hours about sunset.

It is quite ridiculous to drive about Scotland in a time-table frame of mind. I have spent many days exploring every practicable road between Peterhead and Stranraer, Skye and Carter Bar, and long before the first day was over I realized that if you are to see more of Scotland than the Highland road between Perth and Inverness you must give up all idea of touring as one does in other lands. You just go out and explore a road, generally one that leads to the Atlantic or to a lonely loch, and has no by-ways attached to it, and are more than satisfied to come back, as you must, the same way.

There is one tour, however, that uses the same road twice for only forty-two miles—eighty-four in all—which begins at Stirling where the majority of north and west-bound drivers start off, and as the Western Isles tour can be linked up with it, a place for it can be conveniently found in the series. Take the road due north from Stirling to Crieff and Aberfeldy, which leads you through the Sma' Glen and to Amulree and makes a perfect beginning of a singularly beautiful drive. Of the Sma' Glen so much has been written and said that I can do no more than repeat that it is one of the loveliest spots in all Scotland. There are

others, in my view, to be rated much higher, such as Glen Moriston, for example, and Glen Croe, but Sma' has a placid charm of its own that reminds you of a June evening on Loch Lomond. Admittedly, it is a renowned beauty-spot, but if you choose your hour well you need not be reminded of the fact by others who have heard of it. Take it, like everything else in Scotland, very slowly.

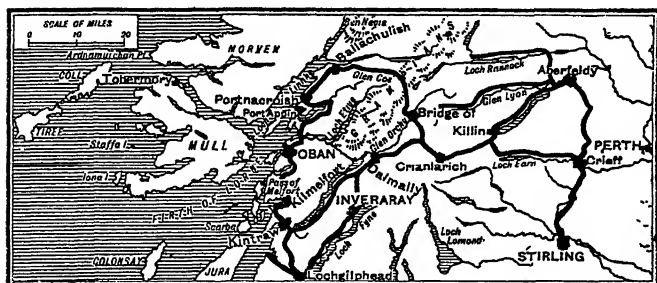
Follows the long climb over the hills to Aberfeldy through Glen Cochill and you come on to the Tay and that incomparable run down the shores of Loch Tay, to me the most beautiful of all the inland lochs. If you feel adventurous, as you should, you can turn off by Fortingal and drive up Glen Lyon.

You can come back to Fortingal, touching Loch Tay at Fernan, whence the road runs straightforwardly to Killin, giving you unforgettable pictures. Between here, Crianlarich, and Dalmally, you are in very well-known and, in the afternoons, well-frequented country, but you will not find it any the worse for that. Set yourself a slow speed and be ready at all times to stop and be entranced. At Dalmally three roads offer themselves to Oban, one, the short one, by Taynuilt and the Brander Pass; another along Loch Awe; a third, by Inverary, Glen Annay, and along Loch Fyne to Carnassery Castle and the tail of Loch Awe. It is one of the last you should choose, for it brings you to one of the best drives in the west. This is over the newly-made road by Kintraw and the Pass of Melfort. It winds and twists up and down among little green hills, every corner showing another and more exquisite view of sea and loch, mountain and island, Jura and Scarba and Mull, set like Islands of the Blest in the blue silk of the Firth of Lorne.

It is a superb drive, but the best is yet to come. After Oban and the somewhat nerve-disturbing passage of the Connel railway bridge, you come to what seemed to me

the loveliest land in the world. The road follows the bays and creeks of Loch Linnhe, and when you get to Appin and again to Portnacraish stop and look back over that enchanted water, past Lismore and the castle to the shores of Mull, dark blue against the evening sky. You will be grateful for being alive.

The road goes on along the lochside to Ballachulish, where you turn eastward under Ben Nevis for Glen Coe upon the first part of the new road. I wish I could say something agreeable about this incredible piece of extravagance. They have, so to speak, transplanted a Great West



Road to one of the most beautiful and loneliest glens in the west, and the effect is deplorable. The old road, upon which you must travel for some miles about half-way, is narrow and difficult, but it served its purpose, and it has always been part of the picture. The new cemented horror, built, presumably, for summer tourists and nobody else, is the worst example of expensive vandalism I have ever seen. And when, near the summit, we had a puncture and the only householder for miles round diagnosed it as a nail-wound, it did not comfort us to be told that the nail must have come from the shoe of a hiker. 'Man, they come past this house in streams,' said this serious Scot. I looked out upon the mighty Grampians, reflected that some forty

miles of steep and lonely road lay between Ballachulish and Crianlarich, and held my tongue. A hardy breed, these hikers. I wish I had seen one.

You get back to Perth by Loch Earn and Crieff, which is a much better way than by Callander. The total distance, taking the Inverary way, but not counting Glen Lyon, is about three hundred miles. Take at least two days over it.

.

I said just now that the peculiar charm of touring in the west of Scotland is that it almost invariably involves a double journey along the same road, holding this, against all argument, to be its greatest asset. Nowhere will you be better convinced of it than when you turn your car's nose from Loch Linnhe towards the coast off which lie Skye and her attendant isles. The precise moment of your arrival in Skye has, of course, no sort of importance. Indeed, you would be well advised to make generous allowance in this matter, the ferry at the Kyle of Loch Alsh having no timetable on which you can rely. You may get across within an hour or so of your arrival at the slip, or you may wait till next day. And so you must plan this particular cruise with a complete disregard of time, making your way towards Skye by sight alone—sight of beauty.

There is only one port of arrival in Skye, but there are three roads that lead you to within sight of it, and at least two of them must be explored if your Scottish cruise is to be anything like complete. The glens and bays and lochs of western Inverness-shire are, perhaps, the loveliest in all Scotland, and nothing in the way of narrow roads (wide enough for one car only), stony ways, or long, steep hills must be allowed to weigh with you. They are all part of the magic of a seaboard that is still very nearly as it was fifty years ago.

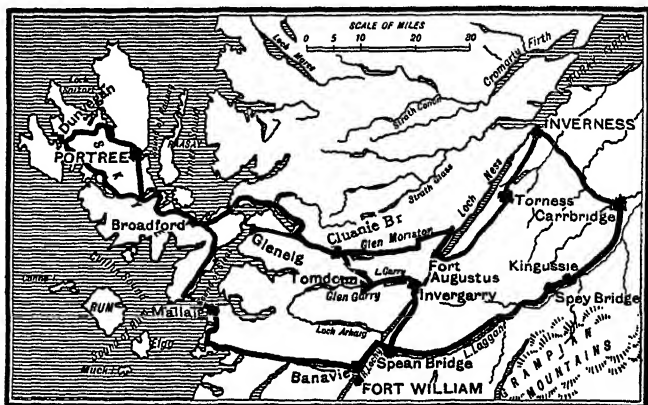
Starting from North Ballachulish — having carefully

avoided the crossing by ferry and gone round the exquisite Loch Leven instead—you make for Fort William along the last shores of Loch Linnhe. Do this in the evening, when the seaweed on the rocks glows like copper in dull silver, a silver that turns to wet opal as you swing round the bends and the light shifts. The copper seaweed and the yellow and purple flags on the loch-side will stay long in your memory. To my obstinate and unprogressive mind the newly-made road to Fort William is one that should be altered at once. The surface is perfect, but is a side-walk, complete with white kerb, essential in such surroundings?

Just beyond Fort William you must turn to the right and follow the road to Mallaig. This is in danger of becoming a seriously renowned beauty-spot, but you must make up your mind to ignore the signs of it. It is utterly beautiful on a cloudless morning, and as you drive slowly along Loch Eil and past the head of Loch Sheil, where stands the Prince Charlie monument in surroundings of such delicate loveliness that you stay entranced at the sight, past the second Eil and Arisaig and Loch Morar, said to be the deepest in Scotland, to Mallaig and your first glimpse of Skye, you know at once that you have come to a place of miracles. From Mallaig you look out across the Sound to Rum, Eigg, and the edge of Skye, along which you will later drive, and you are very grateful. Nor does that gratitude lessen when you have turned about and driven back to Corpach and Banavie, and you see Ben Nevis at its best, snow in the crevasses and all.

Now take the road on the western side of Loch Lochy by Gairloch to Spean Bridge. Keep north up the shore of the loch, where the gorse flows down to the road and the water is black-deep to the very edge, and turn westwards at Invergarry for the road to Skye. It is incomparable, and as you climb higher and higher you are tortured by the thought of all you may be missing. For example, after

Tomdoun, when you turn off to Cluanie Bridge through the real wild, you climb up above Loch Loyne to a point where you stop, looking down over the two halves of the loch, each a dazzling jewel, and over valleys and mountains clothed as hills can only be in Scotland in patches of heather and emerald grass. The enormous shadows sail slowly across the ranges, the air comes straight from the middle of the Atlantic and, that all should be complete, those dots suspended between the peaks are golden eagles. No cars



should be allowed here unless they are painted a dull invisible grey.

At Cluanie Bridge you keep to the right for Skye, through Glen Sheil, but when you reach Loch Duich, forget that ferry and turn off to Glenelg, one of the loveliest corners you will see. It was here, according to respectable legend, that Prince Charlie crossed in his bonnie boat and, later, that less romantic pair, Boswell and Johnson. These facts may not interest you so much as the beauty of the setting, or even so much as the towers left by the Picts, which you can find at the end of a lane a mile or two away. In any case your way to Skye now lies back along the loch and to

Dornie Ferry and the Kyle of Loch Alsh. Once landed on that enchanted isle you must follow your own path, but see to it that it leads you to Aird of Sleet, to Loch Scavaig, Portree, and Dunvegan Castle. One cannot give directions for the exploring of such a place without offence. It is too private a matter.

If it had not been for Cluanie Bridge and what I saw from the mountain-side above it, I might have sent you to Inverness by the old bad road, over Strome Ferry and by Glen Carron. It was in a shocking state when I drove over it, but none the less beautiful. If it is in no better state this year, leave it and come back to Cluanie and Glen Moriston. Over your head on your left tower snow-capped mountains, while on your right the loch makes a perfect foreground to the royal hills over which you climbed a few hours or days ago. Perhaps you will be as lucky as I and count twelve stags in the heather just above you and five about three hundred yards below, but if you come to the river below Bunloinn Forest and find eleven standing in the shallows, with four more on the farther bank, you will have seen something to remember all your grey days at home.

The road ends at Invermoriston and you come back to Fort Augustus. Take the eastern road by Foyers and Torness. The last stage home to Ballachulish lies along the Perth road as far as Kingussie, where you turn off to the right for Loch Laggan, Spean Bridge, and Fort William.





CHAPTER VII

THE HIGHLAND ROAD—IN ABERDEENSHIRE—SUTHERLAND AND CAITHNESS—ROSS AND CROMARTY

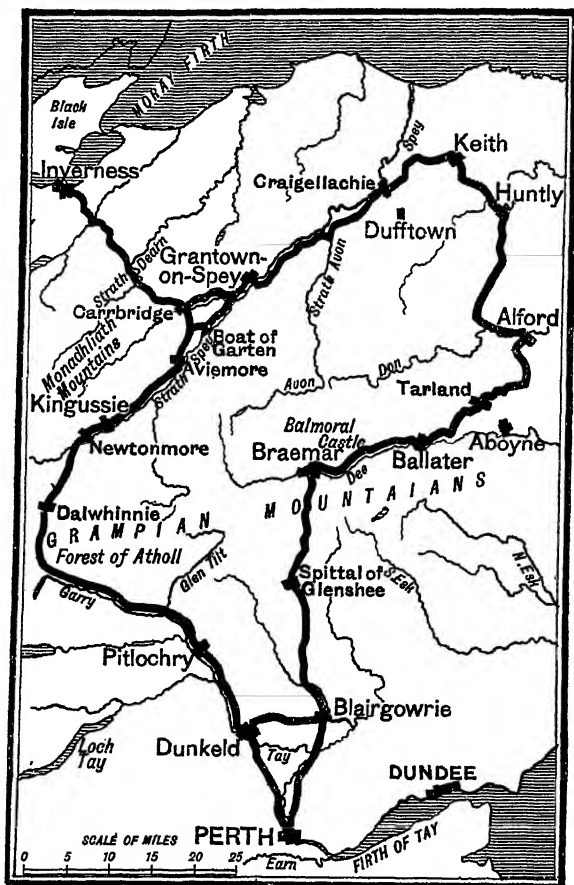
THERE are many lovers of Scotland who say that her greatest road, the mountain way from Perth to Inverness, is not what it was; that it has suffered too greatly from advertisement and that peculiarly destroying form of popularity which sometimes follows it; that many stretches of it which were gloriously wild are now painfully suburbanized. There are always people who say this sort of thing, but, unfortunately, there is too often a foundation of truth in it. Yet though on the days I drove along it last year there were many cars, both private and public, and the northern end seemed to me to have lost something of its character, I thought the power of the petrol station and the subtle influence of road-improvement had been exaggerated. That beautiful road would certainly gain if even the least offensive of the new petrol stations were abolished—a Utopian consideration—but, even so, I doubt if there is a highland road anywhere so magnificent in wild grandeur as the stage between Kingussie and Pitlochry.

The blame must not be laid entirely on the petrol stations. It is a depressing fact that the minor domestic architecture of Scotland, with its small-windowed, grey houses, dark without as within, their faint and rather futile suggestion of the more pretentious sort of French manor, lends an undeserved air of suburbanism to some of the loveliest corners of the hills and glens. Witness Braemar and half a hundred places near towns. The inhabitants of these are probably unmoved by them, but to the visiting traveller from other parts of the kingdom where the villages and country houses form a large part of the charm of the landscape, they are apt to come as a shock. A small Scottish house may be built to keep out the weather, but it seldom has a friendly face.

These things must be accepted and forgotten, and there is no difficulty in doing it after the first introduction. The Highland road is beautiful because of its encircling hills, and it is these and their innumerable colourings under sunshine and cloud, in wind and in still weather that matter. On that superb drive of a hundred and seventeen miles from Perth to Inverness you will very quickly learn to overlook what lies on your direct path, and waste no golden minute which you can give to the glory of your surroundings.

If you agree that the Pitlochry-Newtonmore stretch is the best of the southern half, you will certainly change your mind when you have covered the last stage, from Carrbridge to Inverness, as it should be covered, that is both ways. There is, past question, nothing like it in all Scotland—or, at all events, nothing where reasonable roads exist. No hill-road of my acquaintance possesses two such unbelievably different faces. When you have reached Craggie (being on your way to the Spey and the Dee) you turn about and go back to Carrbridge along a road you swear you have never seen before. The road runs between the Monadliath Mountains and Carn Glas Choire, and the

enormous moors, between thirteen and fourteen hundred feet above the sea, succeeded by gorges and defiles, huge



forests, little lochs miraculously blue in, as you think, any weather, make up a gallery of pictures you can never forget.

On your way eastwards go past Carrbridge, and take the

first turn to the left for Boat of Garten and the Spey, where the forest of Abernethy comes down to the river-side. By-ways of enchantment take you in a few miles to Grantown and the main road, but the whole way from Boat of Garten to Rothes you follow that noble stream. At Craigellachie take the road to Dufftown and then that to Keith and Huntly. This is an exquisite drive along excellent roads. It is often happily deserted and for mile after mile you have no company but that of the rolling hills and the oddly English-looking green country of the Gordons. It makes a wonderful contrast with the Spey valley and the gaunt splendours of the Inverness-shire moors.

Then come the Correen Hills and more heartening expanses, whence the road drops slowly down to the River Don and a smiling land of gorse and broom, green fields, and blue water. The day I came upon it had been perishingly cold, with a north-east gale driving the clouds again and again over the face of the sun, yet as I turned the last corner and saw those glowing colours it seemed certain that I had stumbled upon some secret part of the bitter north where a private summer reigned. It had the very air of places where it never freezes.

Presently you climb a little way and at the top opens out a wonderful valley, hemmed in by hills on whose crests snow lingers in June. Here again are colours to beguile you, a wild mixture of every shade of every yellow, brown, green, and blue that were ever found on painter's palette. In the midst of it all stand those black highland cattle, providing the right emphasis, the perfect relief.

By this time you will be near Alford, but you leave the town on your left and take to winding by-ways on which I lost myself most pleasantly. Your main objective is Tarland and the Dee, near Ballater, and before you get there you come upon one of the most beautiful as well as upon one of the loneliest corners of Scotland. It is a place

of little gently-sloping hills, dense with heather, of little lakes with wooded islets, of wide views of distant fir-topped hills. It lies sheltered from the worst of the wind, and if you have the luck to find it on a sunny evening you will let your pre-arranged routes and time-tables take care of themselves. This is no place to pass through. It will keep you a long time, and give you an utterly unexpected last-minute impression of Aberdeenshire scenery.

Your way back to Perth lies alongside the Dee as far as Braemar, and then over the Devil's Elbow and the Spittal of Glenshee to Blairgowrie.

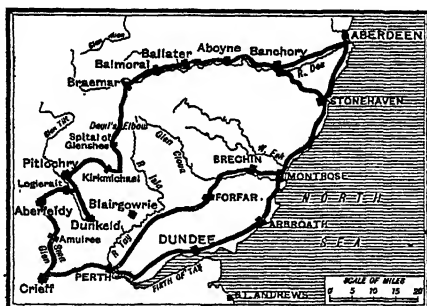
.

All things considered, Scotland must rank as one of the most difficult countries in the world properly and conveniently to explore. It is almost everywhere extremely beautiful, but it suffers, for its size, from difficulties of communication perhaps unequalled anywhere in Europe. Its main roads are comparatively few, and the enthusiast, determined to see it all, must often retrace his wheel-tracks, make long detours, and be prepared, at any rate in the north, for ferries of a more or less adventurous type. Its by-ways in some of the finest parts are so narrow as to make the constant menace of meeting another vehicle a serious drawback, yet with it all and in spite of almost every corner of it south of Banffshire being thronged with tourists in the height of summer, it remains the only serious rival to the south and west of Ireland.

It does not matter, except for convenience in finding a starting-point, which part is taken first, but most lovers of those incomparable hills will agree that the roads north from Stirling, east to Aberdeen, and south again by the sea, are as good an introduction to the real loveliness of Scotland as any. Take Crieff for a beginning, and plan your cruise to take in the three great high places of the eastern High-

lands, the Sma' Glen, the road to Aberfeldy and the Spittal of Glenshee. As soon as you have climbed up to the mouth of the Sma' Glen and entered the gold and green of that perfect miniature of Scots scenery, you are away from the rest of the world. Not until you come to Braemar will you be troubled by crowds or have occasion to remember that duller parts of the world exist.

It was early June the last time I began this cruise and got my first sight of the Grampians beyond the glen, and there was still snow lying in dazzling patches under the thin northern sunshine. This imitation may flatter the



Alps, but its effect on the southern motorist was a toughening experience. It was beauty paid for at a high rate of discomfort, with every puff of wind laying winter's hand on him. Yet as we climbed higher and passed Amulree and won to the greater wild above Aberfeldy, we thought it no price at all.

At Aberfeldy we took the road to the right to Logierait and entered another world, a marvel of bluebells and broom, of birch and beech and hazel, with glimpses of a silver Tay between them, a world among the hills and towered over by them on every side. Those ten miles across country to the Highland road are typical of the unexpected which awaits you round every corner in Scotland. And it goes

on after you have left Pitlochry and turned eastward again and followed Ardlie Water to Kirkmichael. It is lovely and, in an intimate way, beautiful as Sma' Glen. You cannot go fast and you would not come out of a crawl if you could safely do fifty miles an hour.

You take a short cut across from Kirkmichael to the Braemar road at Dalrulzian, and come to the climax of the day. Is there a hill road in all Britain to compare with those thirty-four miles from Blairgowrie? You would not have thought so on that day. The steady pull up, mile after mile, with the winding road cut out of the hill-side giving you new and more glorious views at every mile; the roar of the mountain torrents fighting the shrill skirl of the wind; the look out over that wonderful valley, lengthening and narrowing as you round each bluff shoulder of the hills; the enormous sky over all, busy with the sailing of black clouds and white; the restless sunshine making the whole world a pattern of new greys, greens, and purples every time you turn to look; until, with hardly a warning, you are twisting up the Devil's Elbow and, from the highest road in the kingdom, looking back over its greatest prospect.

Down the other side you coast, mile after beautiful mile, up till the very last moment sole owner of the world, unaware of all else. There can hardly be a greater contrast—shock, perhaps, is the word—than the change from those glorious solitudes to smug Braemar. Yet, when you have shaken off the dreadful neatness of that Highland suburb and are following the Dee past Ballater and Aboyne to Banchory, you are comforted. For the valley is a lovely one and with the sun at your back the river gleams blue as the sea, among its dark woods. You leave it at Banchory and take the road to Stonehaven and come down by the coast to Montrose, whence you return to Perth and Crieff, either by Arbroath and Dundee, or by Forfar.

.

Whenever you take your car to Scotland, or whenever you meet somebody who has just had that delightful adventure, there arises immediately that ridiculous argument—what is the best north of the Border? It is ridiculous because there is no best, or if you like, the best is always different, according to the time of year or the mood in which you see it, and because no country of the same size offers you such an astonishing variety of scenery—the more astonishing because you are so strictly limited in your explorings by the scarcity of roads. There are dull parts of Scotland, though not many, and if you avoid them in order to spend your time in the others you must often use the same road in both directions.

In a country of hills and lochs and, above all, of firths, this is an advantage rather than a drawback. Every hill road, every sea road, has at least two faces utterly different, and by retracing your steps you are not in reality going back the same way, so far as what you see is concerned. An outstanding example of this is the road from Inverness to Carrbridge. Only the man who lives on it will recognize it as the same whether he goes north or south. And the same may be said of most of the loch-side roads and all the high passes over the lonelier hills. It is this that makes Scotland so satisfactory for a meandering tour. Whether you go far or not you always find excellent reason for making a long job of it; whether you use one road or six, you will always be looking at new things.

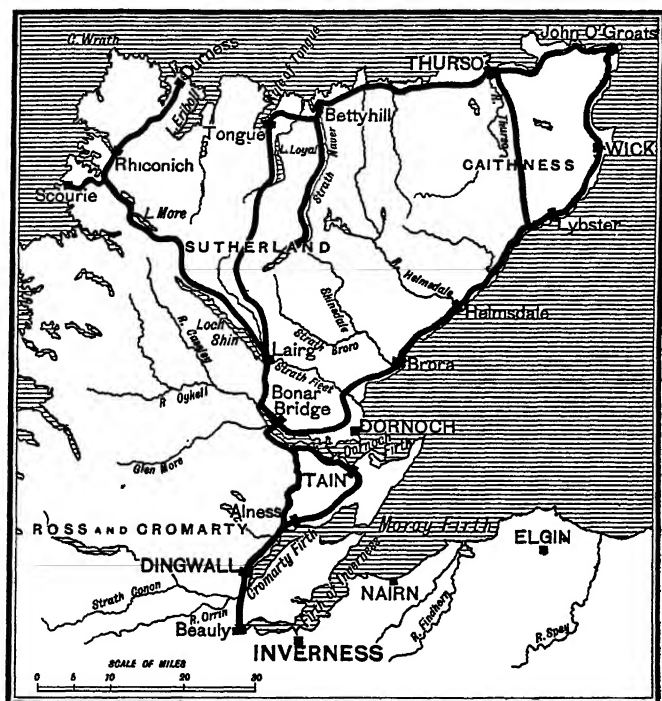
Take as a test case the run north from, say, Beauly, which lies between the end of Moray, Inverness, and Beauly Firths, and the road which comes, at Glen Affric, to that uncompromising end with which you will soon become familiar in Scottish touring. It carries you on to John o' Groats and to within a few miles of Cape Wrath, but the chances are that you will content yourself with a short run up the east coast (for myself, I find the last stage

of the last road in Great Britain dull), and will find your greatest delight in the southern end, between Dingwall and Lairg. If it is your first experience of this very pleasant part of the world you will recognize very little on your return journey of what you saw on your way north. In short, you need never look for a different way home, nor suffer the discomfort of little-used roads—and such can be highly uncomfortable in Sutherlandshire—in order to round off your trip as you would do almost anywhere else in Europe.

It is a lovely road between Dingwall and Bonar Bridge, skirting Cromarty Firth for the first few miles, and then, at Alness, striking inland over the hills. It curls about the flanks of the mountains, with a singing river close by and copses of holm-oak and hazel, larch and fir, dropping down to it every few miles. In June the bracken and gorse are magnificent, and every one of the hundred sudden views you get, as you round the shoulders of the hills, is framed by far-off ridges of firs crowning the summits. You meet nothing by the way, and just as you have made certain that you are on the last road you come down to an ancient grey bridge, spanning the tumbling river, and a cluster of little grey houses sheltering in an exquisite fold of the hills. I think it is Strath Rory; but what is a name in so magnificent a solitude?

You climb up out of that little warm place, through deep woods, and out on to what you decide are the most wonderful hills of all. They are not that, of course, but for the moment you believe it. And when you have reached the highest point, some fifteen hundred feet or more above the sea, you have the wind, the heather, the enormous sky, and, away on your right, the dazzle of Dornoch Firth for all your company. For thirty miles the rolling hills stretch out on your left, virgin of roads till they come down to the shores of Loch Broom. A very proper place for a

dweller in a crowded country. There is infinite peace and comfort in the contemplation of the vast army of bare summits from which the Atlantic winds sweep down, touching land for the first time.



Then come Lairg and Loch Shin, a most comfortable inn and a halt for a night's rest, the recapture of scattered memories of a great day's drive, and the making of plans for the second half of the cruise. There are three alternatives, the first by the coast road to John o' Groats and Thurso; the second by either of the moorland roads to Tongue or Scourie; the third back to Bonar Bridge, along

the side of Dornoch Firth to Tain, and so to Invergordon and Alness. My opinion that the first is only worth while if you have plenty of time will no doubt bring down acrid criticism on my taste, in spite of Gilsraig and the Long Goe of Gloup, but I stand by it. At the end of the second are beautiful places to see, the famous Bighouse Rocks, near Bettyhill, Loch Naver, on the way there, and, on the west, Rhiconich and Loch More. But—a distasteful word to have to use here—the middle road to the north is extremely narrow, the surface is very poor, and if you meet anything on wheels between Lairg and the Crask Inn, Altnaharra and the coast, you may have to reverse for a longer distance than you will find pleasant. From Lairg to Bettyhill is about forty miles.

It is a matter for you to decide, aided by the weather. If it is thick, be content with the return journey by Tain; if you feel adventurous, choose either the road to Laxford (for Scourie) or Tongue, braving the narrow road. You will find it entirely a question of the mood of the moment, and that leads, in motoring, to success quite as often as to failure. If you reach Durness you will be tempted to follow the way round Loch Eriboll, to cross the promontory and to skirt the Kyle of Tongue. I was strongly advised not to attempt it, partly because of the narrowness of the road, partly because the day was one left behind by February, and I did as I was told. Perhaps in July or August you may have more courage than I had in early June.

.

Between the middle of August and the end of September the Great North Road is, from the leisurely traveller's point of view, at its worst, not only because the road itself is uncomfortably crowded with fast traffic by day and uproarious the livelong night with heavy transport, but because it is difficult to find a night's lodging at less than

twenty-four hours' notice. One or two at a time may be able to sleep where they want to, but a party of four will often find that they have to go on long after their intended halting-hour, trying inn after inn. An exasperating business, that effectively destroys both pleasure and peace of mind.

The two roads I recommend east and west of the Great North Road, are not by-ways in the strict sense of the term, but they serve towns which are, with the exception of those between Liverpool and Lancaster, Durham and Newcastle, no busier than county towns; and if you are careful to avoid them on market days, you should not be bothered with traffic for more than a mile or two on either side of them. It will take you perhaps half a day longer to reach Scotland and to get back to London when the time comes to leave that great playground, but you will never grudge the delay.

For the start out I prefer the western way, by the edge of Wales, but the eastern is the more direct, and, as one is more likely to be in a hurry on the way up than on the way down, I advise you to follow it on the outward journey. Taking Chipping Barnet as the starting-point, you go straight to Hatfield and then turn off to the left for Hertford. Keep on to Buntingford and Royston and then take the arrow-straight road that leads to Huntingdon. A little farther on, at Alconbury Hill, you come to the Great North Road, but you keep to it for eight miles only, leaving it again at Norman Cross where you turn east for Peterborough. All about here you can make excellent time, the road being safe and generally free, and the country-side of the open sort that permits of fast travelling.

After Peterborough you skirt the edges of the Fen Country as far as Bourne, and it is very likely that you will be tempted to turn aside at Worth's birthplace and make the detour to Boston, forgetting your haste for the north. Boston and the road to it by Pinchbeck is always worth while. It is

one of the strangest towns in England, using the word in its true meaning. I can never fit Boston into its frame. It is essentially of another country, but whether of France, Holland, or Belgium I would not like to decide. You can return to your proper road at Sleaford, as I have shown.



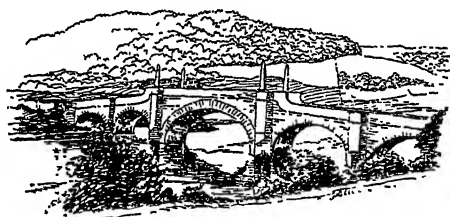
Soon after you see the lovely form of Lincoln Cathedral thrusting into the sky from its abrupt little hill, and thereafter you come upon Ermine Street, that imperial road that runs to near the banks of the Humber. It is not your way, but you should follow it as far as Caenby Corner and there turn off to Gainsborough, instead of taking the shorter way through Torksey. This road brings you to Bawtry, where you get a sight of the Great North Road, but leave

it immediately for Thorne, along the Blaxton road. The Roman straightness disappears hereabouts, and your way to York by Selby and Escrick is of the ordinary sort. The rest of the way to Newcastle and the Scottish frontier by Thirsk and Northallerton, West Auckland and the outskirts of Durham, is simple. You may wonder why I suggest Newcastle. It is partly because it is far less trouble to traverse than to find your way to Morpeth or Hawick by Tow Law, chiefly because the road beyond is magnificent.

The western route home from Carlisle is far more picturesque than the other, though you have to skirt the Black Country at one point. It begins superbly, with that great road that runs through Penrith, over Shap Fell—years ago a sort of terror to the north-bound motorist—and down to Kendal, a model of what a modern highway should be in build and surface. It does not climb impressively high, the peak, five miles south of Shap, being only just over thirteen hundred feet, but it is a glorious drive. After Kendal it becomes unmistakably urban, and when you have left Lancaster and Garstang behind and approached Preston, you realize how wise you are in taking the Liverpool instead of the overland way by Warrington. You pass through Ormskirk or Southport and come down with very little trouble to the Birkenhead ferry which puts you on to the highway to Chester. The other way, through the Black Country, is abominable.

As soon as you are through Chester you are in real country once more, and the road down through Wrexham and Little Chirk on its hill to Shrewsbury is a delight. There is no way of avoiding Shrewsbury, unless you turn off after Chirk to Oswestry and Welshpool and join the road at Ludlow. This has much to recommend it, but you miss the extremely pleasant drive through the valley by Church Stretton and Craven Arms. It all depends upon how much you dislike Shrewsbury which way you will

choose. After Ludlow you take the lesser road to Worcester, by Tenbury, and then pass through Pershore and Evesham, in the Avon valley. Those rich acres, loveliest of all their kind when apple and plum blossom veil the hills in delicate colour, make a fine contrast to the heights of the Cotswolds which border them. You climb up to these by the Fish Hill from Broadway and take the homeward way by Chipping Norton and Oxford, over the Chilterns to Stokenchurch, and so down to Slough by Beaconsfield.



PART IV
SOUTH



CHAPTER VIII

SUSSEX—ITS FORESTS AND COAST

No one, as far as I know, has yet had the audacity to range the counties of England in an order of merit, permitted himself to distribute awards, conceived himself capable of showing reason why one or the other should at all times be considered fairer than its fellows. It would take courage to do it, courage or ignorance, whichever you prefer. For, with very few exceptions, such as those which have been overrun by commerce, the English counties are always beautiful—and never in the same way. If such a misleading classification was ever made, Sussex must have ranked high in it.

I would not quarrel with its place in that list, but I would be relieved that somebody else had been responsible for it. Nine times out of ten I am as fully convinced that Sussex is the best of all, as I am a week later that there is none to compare with Yorkshire, Dorset, Westmorland, and Gloucestershire. The tenth time is when, for my obviously numerous sins, I have to take the direct way from London to Brighton.

There is no end to the new beauties of Sussex. Every time you set out to wander through its countless by-roads,

even on occasion along its highways, you find peace and loveliness where it had never before occurred to you to look for them. You may know by heart how any particular road runs, past what villages, over what hills, through what woods, but you will never find it the same. Nobody can ever know Sussex. If all its ways are familiar, all are always new.

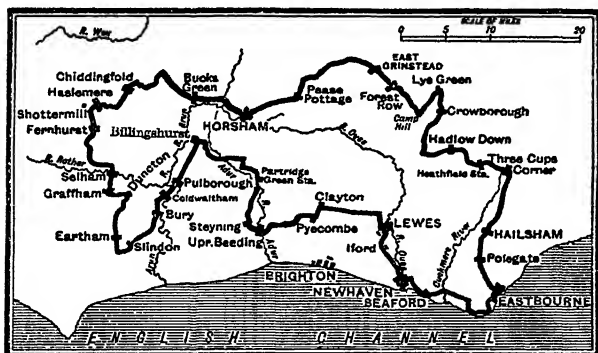
Here is a run I have done in very grim weather to prove to an unbeliever that he, no more than I, knew hardly more than our way about the English county whose farthest point from Westminster Bridge is seventy miles. Start from East Grinstead—it is not only a typical Sussex town, but one of the few in the Home Counties which have managed to preserve their character—and take the road to Ashdown Forest. You must take a large-scale map and be prepared to zigzag a good deal. For example, after Forest Row you bear to the left and take the Maresfield road, which you follow some four miles. Here you are at the highest point and in the middle of the best of that small, but beautiful, forest. No matter what time of year, the views all round you are superb.

Turn sharp to the left, half a mile short of Camp Hill, and go down into the lower part of the wood to Lye Green, again turn to the right before Crowborough, follow the Lewes road for about five miles, and at the cross-roads turn to the left for Buxted and Hadlow Down.

Hereabouts, too, you will have to keep a sharp look out for the right road. Your way goes past Heathfield station to Three Cups Corner, where you turn south along the Eastbourne road. Very soon you are out of the woodlands and into the Pevensey levels by Hailsham and Polegate, but, none the less, the country-side retains its own special attraction.

You can skirt Eastbourne if you wish to explore the hilly by-road which leads to Beachy Head, or, if you are not

inclined for a sight of that great promontory, you turn to the right just short of the town and follow the road through Friston to Seaford and Newhaven. The latter, one must admit, has few charms, but you are quickly out of it and along the peaceful road to Lewes, which runs through the valley of the Ouse. You need not enter Lewes if you turn sharp to the left at the station, and again to the left two miles farther on just before Cooksbridge station. For the next few miles you skirt the northern side of Ditchling

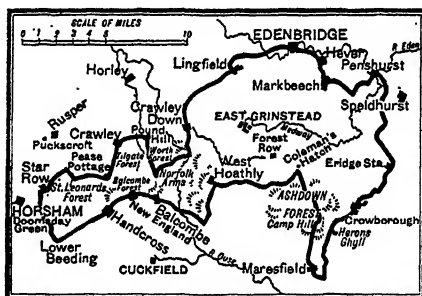


Beacon and the mass of the South Downs, and by that time you will probably be in the mood in which to compare those friendly hills very favourably with those of Berkshire.

At Clayton turn to the left for Pyecombe, and then to the right and make a circle round New Timber Hill to Poynings. Through Upper Beeding, Steyning, and Partidge Green you cross the Weald till you come to Billingshurst and once more turn about and aim for the hills. It is a familiar road by Pulborough and by Bury Hill, but it is only familiar in the Sussex way; which means that you will find it more beautiful than ever. Beyond Slindon turn again to the right through Eartham and over the downs till you get to the bottom of Duncton Hill. Here, on your

left, is a private road from East Lavington to Graffham; it runs under the sheer side of the South Downs and is one of the most beautiful spots in the county; but if you are embarrassed by the need for asking permission to use it, you can join the route again by taking the next turn to the left to Selham.

Immediately after Selham you turn to the left and come to another familiar road of beauty, the way through Easebourne and Fernhurst to Haslemere. It is true that just



about here you touch Surrey, and must give that county credit for one of the best moments of the day; but as soon as you have turned off to the right for Chiddingfold you are back in Sussex once more. Wandering by-ways lead you by Dunsfold and Bucks Green into Horsham, and after that your way back to East Grinstead takes you through the best of St. Leonard's Forest and by Crabbet Park and Felbridge. Those eight miles or so between Horsham and Crawley form a fitting conclusion to a wonderful day's run.

It was open weather with a southerly wind, the better half of a gale, April-like showers and unbelievable expanses of blue sky, with whole fleets of gleaming cloud—ships sailing races—weather for the downheads and the moors,

for the hills and for the sea. It was warm and already the buds on the London shrubs were being tricked into thinking that at least the first two months of the year had been mislaid. There was even the real smell of spring in the streets.

It was the sight of those ridiculous buds in a London square that reminded me of the little forests which lie, for the most part unnoticed, between Crowborough and Horsham. When those icy winds come to us from the Russian Steppes across the coldest sea south of the Arctic, and life becomes, for so many of us, definitely not worth living within reach of their prying fingers, we shall turn gratefully to the woods for comfort. Out of that assassin wind and in the friendly company of trees we can for a while at least pretend that all is well with the world, that we can wait for spring in reasonable patience. There was once a picture in *Country Life* of an avenue of ancient beeches lining one side of a Roman road through Balcombe Forest. I could not identify the road as part of any I know—that is nothing, for my knowledge is hardly to be rated—but the thought of the smooth trunks and of the perfect carpet that must be spread at their feet took me very quickly down to the warm woods.

If you do not know the little Sussex forests, you must not let their impressive name nor the suggestion of their important number mislead you. They would hardly be called forests across the Channel, or in Scotland—supposing you think of a forest as a large wood. I believe that was not its original meaning, but it is the one accepted by most of us who are above being pestered by pedantry. The two largest are St. Leonard's in the west and Ashdown in the east, and, not to put too fine a point upon it, the others are to be found within them. Not officially, perhaps, nor according to the maps, but undoubtedly in fact. The little forests are all one, with several names.

Their names are very pleasant, Worth, Tilgate, Balcombe, English to the last letter and therefore very old. Old and very English, too, are the place-names you find hereabouts, as you drive most indirectly about the heart of Sussex. Do you not like Heron's Ghyll, for example, just below the edge of Ashdown, Doomsday Green, and Furnace, where quite obviously one of Henry the Second's ironmasters must have set up his key-industry? Or Hindleap, near Wych Cross, and Slaugham and Devil's Den, and, though it sounds, poor thing, suburban to-day, Falconhurst? Gallypot Street, or something very like it, is to be met with in other counties, if I remember right, and Cernes and Brocas have a familiar ring, but they go very well with this part of old England. Even if these really came from Normandy, Eden Brook must be English enough. Eden Brook.

Start, as I did, from somewhere near Edenbridge, and begin your day's wanderings by following that lovely woodland road that takes you close to Hever Castle, by Mark-beech, up to Penshurst and then south again to Speldhurst and Eridge. I will not guarantee you smooth going, and mud is likely to be much in evidence, but you will think nothing of all this in your delight at seeing so exquisite a piece of unspoilt country. Soon after Eridge you begin to climb up to Crowborough, where you take the Lewes road and follow it past Poundgate and Heron's Ghyll (it is no more than a patch of land) to the cross-roads a mile to the right of Buxted. Here you turn northward again through Maresfield and cross the best part of Ashdown Forest. Between Camp Hill and the inn at Coleman's Hatch you will be much delayed. This road and its twin, two miles to the west of it, are very hard to beat for a show of real Sussex scenery.

A by-way takes you westward through Wych Cross to West Hoathley station, south for a couple of miles and then west again to Balcombe, where you begin to skirt Balcombe

Forest and St. Leonard's. Actually, you run through the southern and most beautiful part of the combination between Balcombe and Handcross, past New England, though you are almost on the boundary. The road lifts a little above the Weald and you look out between the mighty boles, as through a casement, upon incomparable English woodland.

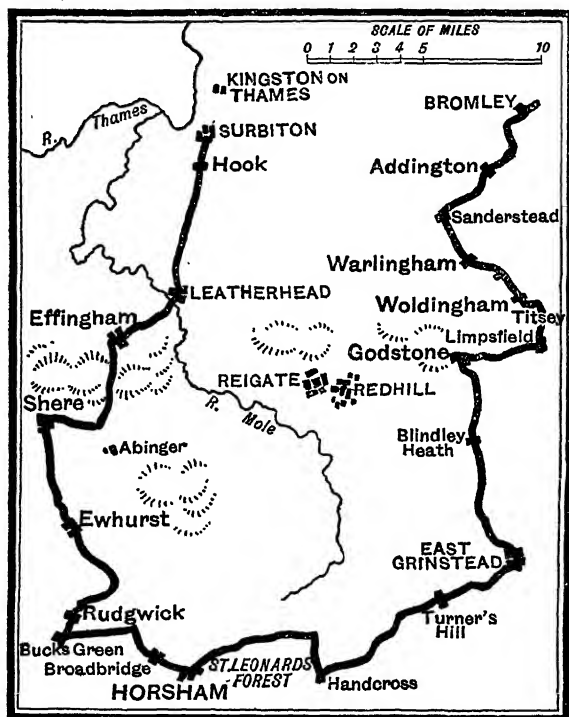
You come down to Lower Beeding and then bear to the right to avoid Horsham at Doomsday Green. A mile farther on, at Star Row, you join the Horsham-Crawley road and follow it till you reach the first turning to the right. Take this and the next to the left, which brings you to Pease Pottage and the main Brighton road. You will have seen the best that can be seen of St. Leonard's Forest from roads navigable by cars. What you should do, of course, is to abandon the car in a convenient spot and spend an hour afoot among the wise trees. They can be very good company sometimes.

That haggard Brighton road runs from Handcross through Tilgate Forest, but there are no ways through it on either hand but footpaths. Perhaps it is as well. You get to Crawley in a few minutes and there turn eastwards again for a couple of miles and at Pound Hill head south through Worth Forest, as far as the Norfolk Arms. Once again you double back and follow the road to Turner's Hill and back to Edenbridge by Crawley Down and Lingfield.

Surrey and Sussex are an inexhaustible treasure for the week-end motorist. I thought I knew every mile of every navigable road in them and of those which cross the boundaries of the neighbouring counties, but after a certain autumn day I spent in the lanes between the North and South Downs I have serious hopes of being able to continue to explore them for several years to come, with the certainty of finding something new every time.

I took as my main object St. Leonard's Forest, that beautiful and peaceful stretch of country between East

Grinstead and Horsham, which, so the map seems to tell you, is crossed north and south by roads to Brighton and Worthing, and little else. There are many delightful by-ways running through it east and west which are mercifully



so modestly marked, even on a half-inch map, that I dare say most people would take them for impracticable or, what is nearly as bad, private roads. It is a place of infinite peace and quiet, and, although its height above sea-level is insignificant, the views you get from the most unexpected places in it are the equal of most of the best anywhere in the Home Counties. It is a place for a long and very lazy day, for

leisurely picnics, and for complete disregard of time and distance.

It is obviously impossible to find any new way of leaving London in any direction, and one cannot look upon oneself as an explorer until the North Downs have been reached. Croydon and its immense surroundings being the main thing to avoid, I took my favourite way south by Dulwich and Beckenham to Addington, Sanderstead, and along that magnificent road down the hill to Titsey, with its great views across the valley to Ashdown Forest. At Limpsfield, where you join the road to Redhill and follow it as far as Godstone, you come into the bus routes again, but only for two or three miles.

As you enter East Grinstead just after the railway bridge, take the sharp turn to the right where a signpost leads you to Turner's Hill. Hereafter, by a zigzag course to the outskirts of Horsham, you run through the heart of the forest and, as I said, you have every chance of doing it alone. It is an extraordinarily beautiful run, the road being lifted high and giving you magnificent views on either side. They are specially beautiful where they enter Worth Forest. At the Cowdray Arms, you enter Balcombe Forest by a road which is nothing but a tunnel of beeches, in summer so dark with their heavy foliage that, coming to it from the bright sunlight behind, you are compelled to drop down to a crawl in order to see your way in the first few moments.

This tunnel leads you to a cross-roads astonishingly called New England (I imagine there is a farm of that name just there) and gives way to one of the finest avenues in any forest. Here you have again superb views over the rest of the wood, while on your left the forest stands apparently impenetrable and illimitable.

Here you must again follow the main road for two miles nearly as far as Pease Pottage, where you turn off sharply to the left and follow another road of exquisite woodland

views through Roffey to Horsham, where you must be at considerable pains to find the right way out if you are to avoid an unnecessary stretch of main road. You go as far as Broadbridge, and then, a mile farther on, turn to the left to Bucks Green, following more or less the course of the River Arun. It is a detour, but well worth it for the views you get when you turn to the right through Rudgwick and up on to the Ewhurst Road. At the latter village you begin the beautiful climb up Pitch Hill and follow the narrow road down into Shere, flaming with a riot of wild flowers. At Shere you turn to the right and follow the Dorking road for two miles to a point a little beyond Abinger Hammer, and then, with due precaution and an eye to a very rough surface, start on the surprisingly steep climb up the Effingham road over the White Downs. This narrow and steep way is a chalk one, and should, I imagine, be avoided on a wet day, but in fine weather it makes a magnificent ending to a day of wandering among Surrey by-paths. The beeches and hazels shut you in completely for most of the way, and when you want a view you must stop and look for it between the boles. The road comes down to the Guildford-Leatherhead road at Effingham, and the way to London lies through Leatherhead and Esher, or through Hook, Surbiton, and Kingston.

.

It was no misfortune that a gale of the sort that gets into the newspapers under terrific headlines should have been raging when I went down to the Sussex coast to rediscover the winter charm of that part of England the lover of solitude avoids in summer. At intervals there came furious squalls of wind and blinding rain, the flowering shrubs and tamarisks in the bungalow gardens were wildly tossed, the sky grew dark at midday, and the sea turned itself into a yellow-grey mystery, moaning coldly, and, for the most part, invisibly,

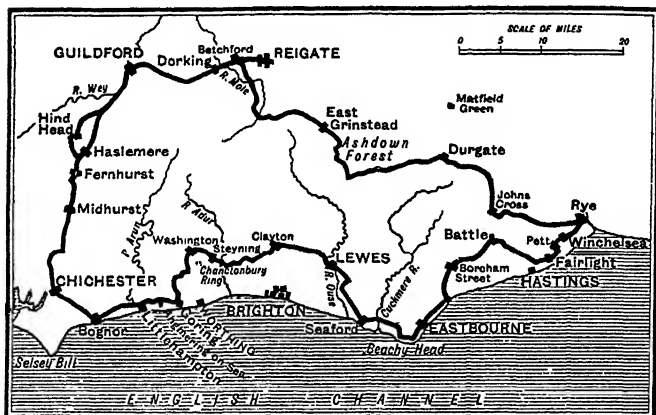
somewhere up-stage. Here was no heroic storm, such as the Atlantic provides or the Mediterranean, no grandeur, no thrill. It was just an ugly winter's day on the English Channel, with the one saving grace that it was not cold. Cross-Channel passages were very rough.

It was certainly no misfortune. It had not occurred to me that any part of the coast between Selsey Bill and Dungeness could be anything but dismal at this time of year—not, perhaps, dismal every day, but maintaining a weekly average of grey depression that must inevitably call up memories of warmer, lighter places, very much to its disadvantage. I came down into the middle of that gale and found delightful surprises. Within fifty yards of that frankly ditch-like sea snapdragons were still flourishing, the lawns in the gardens were as green and fresh as their fellows twenty miles inland, pink and blue clumps of hydrangeas stood up bravely to the wind's assault, and, save for the clean smell of the seaweed and the roar of the shingle on the beach, the whole scene might have been laid somewhere in the south-west of France.

Conditions could hardly have been worse, certainly no better for any one who wished to prove that we have no substitute in England for the places in Europe which are rather more in the sun. Yet there was much evidence, in addition to that brought forward by the snapdragons and the hydrangeas, that winter can be pleasantly endured on at least some parts of the Sussex beaches. It may have been the air, but more probably the scudding gleams of sunshine that persuaded one of the truth about the climate hereabouts. When the sky appears over that hospitable strip between the Downs and the sea, it has real colour in it; if the sun shines but for a moment, you can feel as well as see it. The iron grip of winter's fingers is less rigid where the tamarisks and the cedars grow comfortably, and men make fortunes out of figs and carnations and mushrooms. These grow

under shelter, just as the carnations do between Ventimiglia and Alassio.

The road that takes you to these unexpected havens is anything but a straight one, and is only a coast-road in the sense that from almost any point on it you may descend upon the sea. It is, in reality, much better than a coast-road, as it sometimes climbs high among those very English Downs, and, from an opening in the beech-woods, shows



you glimpses of the coastline which, like a fashionable photograph, agreeably flatter it. There is nothing the matter with that coastline, but in several places it is defaced by enormous quantities of houses. From a few miles away these blemishes dwindle to scarcely distinguishable patches. You can even regard Brighton itself with equanimity from certain angles.

I took Guildford as my starting-point for a preliminary run along the nearer stretch of the south coast, and came down that most beautiful of all our main roads, the Portsmouth road, as far as Hindhead. The alternative way, by Haslemere, is more for the summer months, in my opinion,

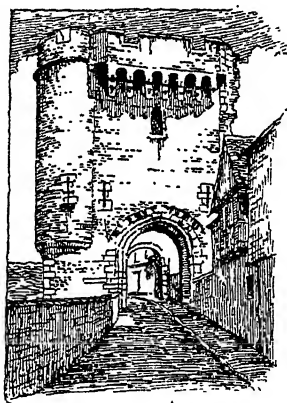
when that magnificent sweep up round the Devil's Punch Bowl is too beset by its admirers for comfort.

At Chichester you turn eastwards for Bognor Regis and the sea, and then begin the tracing of that winding way on which I found so many heralds of a gentle English winter. It is, in itself, not a very exciting road, but you would do well to take it quietly, lest you miss the charm of it. It is between Bognor and the outskirts of Worthing that you will probably find the pleasantest surprises, where real country drops gently to the sea, and the bronze-coloured fields are bounded almost by the shingle of the beaches. The grey-green Downs stand up boldly on the north, and between them and the breaking waves lies good farm land, stacks and byres, cottages, hedgerows, and ancient trees. The last are mostly oaks, and when you come to the parts about Angmering-on-Sea, which I remember last as East Preston, you will like the contrast with the cedars and the tamarisks.

Leave your car and walk along what I think must be the pleasantest sea-walk in England. The turf is of the sort of which you make the best inland golf-greens, yet the edge of the six-foot cliff and the sea below it are hardly ten yards away. I do not want an explanation of this phenomenon, being more than content to accept it as part of the promise of a merciful winter, but it is certainly an unusual sight. On your left, reaching right up to the dim outlines of the Downs, is just that kind of country which Mr. Cecil Aldin gives us in his later hunting drawings. When you trouble to think of the fact that Littlehampton, Worthing, Brighton, and their adjuncts are only just out of sight, you feel grateful again that you live in England, where such things are possible.

Turn up at Goring towards Chanctonbury Ring and Washington, by way of Patching and Findon, and then come down to Steyning and keep north of and well above Brighton by the Downs road through Upper Beeding and

Clayton. At Lewes you drop down, by the River Ouse, to Seaford, and cross the hills, round by Beachy Head if you are in the mood for it, to Eastbourne and Pevensey Bay. There is no point (except perhaps, Cooden) in going through Bexhill, and you will do best to go round by Boreham Street to Battle, and so down to Ore and the adventurous cliff-roads by Fairlight and Pett. So you come in the end to Winchelsea and Rye, and the road home across the Weald through East Grinstead.





CHAPTER IX

HAMPSHIRE AND SURREY—WHERE PEACE HIDES

IF all old England, in every mile of her by-ways, contains treasure for the properly-minded explorer, one of the very richest corners must be that enchanted patch which lies between Southampton Water and the River Arun. Those many thousands who rank *They* among the truest short stories ever written, are usually most deeply moved by the account, wonderful in its brevity, of the writer's drive across the county, where hill-top beckoned him to hill-top, and, in half a sentence, he gives you the impression of a real explorer, a person singled out by Fortune herself for the most profound discoveries. That was written many years ago, long before England had a million motor cars or had ever heard of a forty-miles-an-hour charabanc. Yet it is as true a description to-day of a wander east and west by the side of the South Downs as it was when 'They' were discovered.

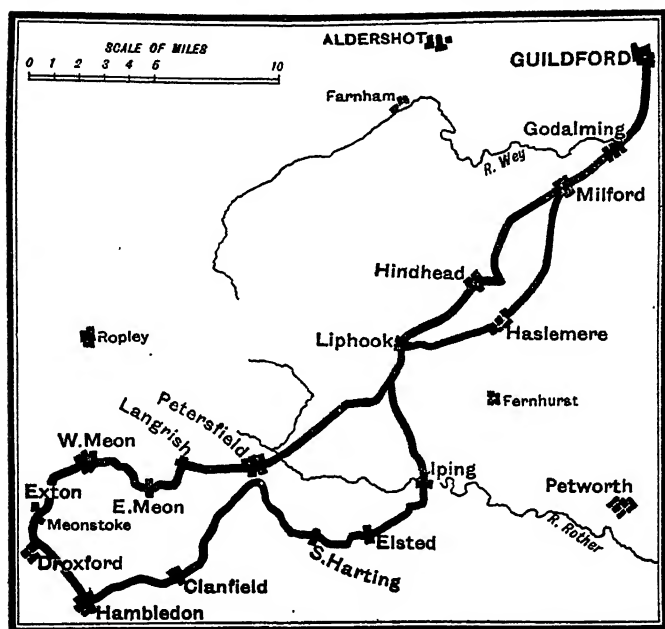
I suppose because I must have explored this part of the world oftener than any other, and knew that that is always more than a sufficient reason for doing it again, I set out one summer's day to follow the River Meon from its source as far towards its mouth as would make a pleasant drive for a day in July. The Meon came into the day's expedition, but very early ceased to maintain its position as the reason for everything. Hard by the Portsmouth road, not

far from half a dozen other tarred and congested sections of the king's highway, I came across all kinds of things which might have served as notes for Mr. Kipling when he found those deep woods 'on the other side of the county'. If you look at the map, no matter on what a large scale it may be, you must be forced to the conclusion that the number of side-roads, of hills, of woods, and of tiny villages, is strictly defined. A map may be the most wonderful picture-book in the world, and the most stimulating to the ordinary man's imagination; but, like a photograph, it cannot lie. Or at least so I would have said before that day, losing my way and finding it again, and caring neither one way nor another, somewhere between the Meon and the Rother. I was wrong. 'True' or not, you follow uncharted ways, find unofficial lanes everywhere.

I had meant in all good faith to go exploring as far as the Cuckmere River, but by the time I had left the Meon and lost my way for the fourth time, it was obvious that the Cuckmere must wait for another day. I went first to Petersfield, and I made no attempt to find alternatives to the Portsmouth road, which is, past question, the most beautiful highway in all England. By-ways were to follow as soon as I left it, but until you reach your real point of departure you must be very hard to please if you do not find the whole of the road, from at least Guildford, a way of delight.

At Petersfield turn off on the road to Langrish, which takes you in a mile or two to East Meon, where you first meet, or at all events come within speaking distance of, the river. This is a charming valley road all the way from Langrish to West Meon, a road of quite typical Hampshire scenery—and any one who knows the Home Counties will understand this particular description. Surrey and Sussex, Hampshire and Kent, differ from each other in the eyes of their lovers in almost the same degree as do France and Italy.

The road keeps pretty close to the river, but you come across it properly introduced for the first time near Exton, just before Meonstoke, where there is a little toy weir, a quaint church steeple, and a piece of an unspoilt village. A little farther on, just before Droxford, bear to the left



for Hambledon, and then again by not very easy ways to Clanfield. Here you have a mixture of town and valley country, where the road sometimes runs full in the eyes of the sun, and at other times through green tunnels. Just after Clanfield comes an interlude along a couple of miles of the Portsmouth road, over Butser Hill, and then you will find—at all events, I found—by very deviating ways, the village of Elsted, to the south and east of Petersfield. I had meant to climb South Harting Hill, but I missed my way,

and I cannot be sufficiently thankful. The road runs through the best sort of common, of pines and gorse and bracken, across whose misty expanse the South Downs stand up like blue headlands. The road crosses the Midhurst-Petersfield road, and in a moment you find yourself at Iping, which has an old bridge over the River Rother, which should rank with the best in the country.

Very deep in ferns, the little lane runs up an endless tunnel under solidly locked hazel boughs, in darkness lit as it seemed only by poppies, up and up until, near Queen's Corner, it drops down suddenly into a cup in the hills which has no equal for loveliness and stillness of the real English sort. Out of it again it runs up another deep cutting in the woods, up a surprisingly sharp little hill, by some lodge gates, where you must stop and look back through the firs across what looks like a mountain valley. You have this world of hills and woods to yourself. It is all part of the magic of the country where 'They' could be found. At half a mile farther on you join the stream of the Portsmouth road, two miles south of Liphook.

.

Is there anybody who understands Surrey, who can explain why, itself one of the most suburban of the Home Counties—in great part, at least—it manages still to conceal in the folds of its hills and valleys the sort of country-side that strangers who have never seen it, dream of as the truest picture of old England? We who know those shy by-ways are very jealous of their beauty, very grateful that it is preserved for us in this incomprehensible way, but we must accept it all as nothing less than a miracle. We squeeze out the ugliest of our red-brick towns till they almost touch; we build new, useful, but hideous roads; we enlarge, straighten, widen, and completely alter old ones; we do everything man can do to turn the loveliest patch of southern England into

a howling abomination of bricks and cement; and all the time, in between the scars our detestable operations leave on the land, old Surrey dreams on as little perturbed by what is happening five miles away as the peewits on a northern moor are by the mills of Bradford. It shows immense strength of character, to say the least of it.

Three years ago I had a letter from an American asking me where the nightingale sang, at a convenient distance from London. I did my best to be of use, but as this unfortunate bird is now so apt to be dragged into the B.B.C. programmes, whence it may be pirated in Heaven knows what part of the world, I answered with no great confidence. The nightingale, I said, used to sing in the woods below Newlands Corner, for example, or in certain parts of the New Forest, even within tremor of the newly-electrified railway to Windsor, but now—who could tell where he had found a safe refuge from Sir John Reith and his notable efficiency?

It was easier to answer the next one, from over many miles of blue water. I was asked where English primroses grew, and could be seen and picked. The writer was on the other side of the world, where the yellow spring flower is what we call mimosa, where the primrose has never yet gleamed. I went to see.

I followed some old roads and some—to me—new ones; and, as always happens, I found an entirely new Surrey. Four times in every year there is officially a new one, in spring, summer, autumn, and winter, but every time you leave the high road and take to the little lanes you make new discoveries, find old friends wearing new faces, make new friends among the woods that look like old ones. And I do not remember any part of it ever looking more beautiful than it was on that unforgettable day of golden sunshine. Here and there the chestnuts were in leaf (the car was scattered with their 'cockchafers' at the end of the day), the

beeches were beginning to show their very best shades of translucent greens, and among the solemn firs of a dozen hill-side coppices the larches gleamed like candles.



I took Beaconsfield as a starting-point and began the day very propitiously by coming down to Windsor through Burnham Beeches. It was a Sunday, and I dare say in the afternoon that unique wood was uncomfortably crowded, but before ten o'clock of the morning we slid between those

wonderful trees as privately as you please. It was our own wood. Skirting Windsor Great Park you come now to Ascot and the Salisbury road, but you must turn off it at Windlesham and make your way to Chobham, looking out upon that astonishing place called the Ridges. An exceedingly winding road takes you through Pirbright to Normandy and then straight up the flank of the Hog's Back, across the main road and down the other side to the Wey valley past Puttenham.

And here begins the peculiar loveliness of Surrey. Puttenham Common is a miniature moor, lost and forgotten between two roaring highways, beautiful beyond belief. It has a tarn, a little blue pond crossed by the road, and just after it a lane leads you to the left and Shackleford. Those who are not interested in this hamlet go straight on and at the next cross-roads turn to the left for Elstead and Milford.

Presently you come to Milford and the Portsmouth road and, if there are not too many people about, you turn your car's nose up that incomparable sweep to Hindhead. Do not forget that on your left lies a picture of the Surrey Weald that cannot be rivalled anywhere. Take the first to the left at the top, by the inn, and drop down into Haslemere and then, driving very slowly and with every precaution, climb up the zigzag way round Blackdown Hill to Barfold and the road to Lodsworth. It is not only primroses you will find here, but the essence of English wayside beauty.

Turn off to the left at Dial Green or Lurgashall and find your long way back by Chiddingfold, Cranleigh, Ewhurst, and the splendour of Leith Hill. By the time you have crossed the Dorking road at Abinger Hammer, climbed across the common to Effingham and Camilla Lacey, you will have seen that which is worth driving many more than a hundred miles to see. Your last sight of old Surrey you get, not, as you should, from the top of Box Hill, but from

White Downs. From Box Hill you see only new roofs now, and slate ones at that.

.

How many Londoners and those who live within sight of the valley between the two little hill ranges, Leith and Netley Heath, know what a variety of beauty they conceal from most people who hurry past them north and south? Everybody knows Ranmore Common, Leith Hill, Box Hill, and their neighbours; Leith Hill especially, since Friday Street, Holmbury St. Mary, and Sutton received such embarrassing publicity the other day, but how many know their charm from the little roads behind and round them? I certainly thought I had long ago explored every mile of every lane of them, from the wonderful by-ways round Coldharbour Common to the precipitous little beech-tunnels between East Horsley and White Downs; but, as always happens in England, even where the buses run into Balham, I found that the best had yet eluded me.

It was altogether a day of magic. All night the rain had lashed the streets and the wind howled madly among the chimney-pots, and hope of a day in the open died at dawn, such a grey, soaking dawn as only London can show in January. By ten o'clock the sun was out and in full control of the heavens, a pale sun, it may be, but full of vigour, and with all an English sun's ability to paint an old familiar scene in new and entrancing light. It was a silver day, with just enough blue overhead to swear by, and enough clear, soft light to show up to perfection the still living gold of the bracken on the Portsmouth road, drenched in a fall of gleaming jewels. Those woods between Esher and Wisley Common never wore so enchanted a look.

We went down the greatest of all English highways, revelling in the delicate light and the clean-washed air as much as in the magnificent absence of traffic. Eighty-one

miles we covered on that short day, a good half of them unavoidably on main roads, yet though it was a Saturday we drove in an almost pre-war quiet. That stretch between Esher and Sutton Place remains undefeated, one of the best of a superb road, and it is in winter that it reveals its greatest loveliness.

Half-way down Guildford High Street we turned to the left and took the Horsham road as far as Bramley, where we bore to the right and made for Hascombe. You must be careful about signposts here, as there are several little roads all leading, eventually, to the same places. The one to follow goes by Thorncombe Street, and you must resist all suggestions to stray right or left to Hambledon or Palmer's Green. Those may do very well for another day; but if you are looking for the habitually unexpected in the English country-side, keep on to Hascombe and only bear to the left when you get to the Cranleigh road.

The habitually unexpected is solitude. It is little more than a lane, not wide enough in places for two cars abreast, but for the whole of its modest length it behaves like a trail blazed by pioneers. It curves up and down over little hills, sweeps round bends which give you flashes of miniature mountains, forests, heaths. So swiftly do they succeed each other that you are perpetually stopping in the most awkward places lest you miss any of the exquisite pictures. It did not matter at all, as we had the whole place to ourselves, and by the look of the road no less than by the feel of things, the voices heard in the woods and hedgerows, this heavenly spot must live a country life. A tiny brook keeps cheerful company with you by the wayside, such an absurd little stream as would stamp any bit of tumbled hill and woodside as pure England.

All that corner of the road round the back of the Surrey hills, from Bramley to Cranleigh, is a corner of peace. You see famous places far off, like Leith Hill and Pitch Hill,

rearing their monstrous bulk into the sky, but you are in another part of the world altogether. Nothing in England was ever forgotten, but some places have been left alone. Peace Corner, Hascombe way, is one of them. It cannot die, so there is no harm in murmuring 'Requiescat' when you salute it.

The straight part of the road is very crooked, and again you must watch the signposts. You are constantly crossing pushful highways running north and south, sometimes obliged to follow them for a few hundred yards. This happens at Cranleigh and Ewhurst, and that delightful place, Forest Green (almost as good as Dial Green, under Blackdown). Finally, at Ockley, you must turn north along one of them to Dorking. Nevertheless, between Cranleigh and Ockley and Holmwood you see three sides of Leith Hill you would never suspect to have existed. The backs of the Surrey hills are their best sides, as you will agree if you have the day's luck we had. For the sun drew quietly off, leaving that odd artificial light which you never recognize until afterwards, an odd light and a familiar yet indefinable feel. On the way home a little snow fell. It filled the dusky streets for a moment, fat flakes whirling across the bonnet. An English winter's day.

.

'There are no familiar English roads—only roads we know.' I overheard this remark a little time ago when I was many hundred miles from the nearest English signpost, resting my back against a red-capped kilometre stone, inscribed with the thrilling letters R.N., a distinguishing number—10, to be exact, the official designation of the road to Spain—and an imposing calculation of the distance from a far-away French town, and though it sounded obscure to the point of paradox I thought I understood it perfectly.

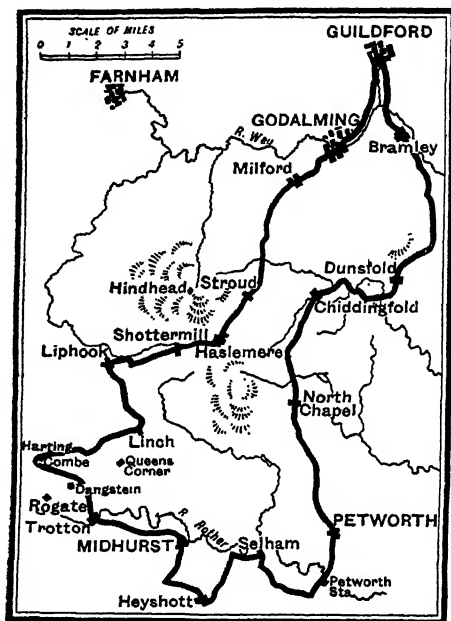
There is no road, from No. A1 to C500 (if there is such a road) with which the wanderer by car is ever really familiar. We may have travelled over it a thousand times, a thousand times noted this or that beautiful view or feature, known it, we thought, as we knew our own garden, but every time we set wheel on it we realize, afterwards if not at the moment, that in some sort or another it is a new road. Its general appearance is familiar, but it is always new. It is like a play with only one scene, in which several acts are played and numbers of players appear. It serves only as a background for an infinite diversity of surprises. It may be that all the roads in the world are of this kind, but it is certainly true of every road in England. It is their most precious quality. They make pioneers of us every day.

No matter how often you may have driven to the South Downs from London, or, say, from Brighton to Aldershot, using the Portsmouth road, the Petworth-Milford road or any of the enchanting by-ways which run between, and on either side of them, you never see them the same, nor is there any end to their variations. Here, for example, is a week-end run to the coast beyond Bournemouth, for any one who is still under the delusion that he is familiar with his Hampshire and Sussex borders. It is very likely that he has traversed the road a score of times, and that he has discovered a score of delights which are still new to the rest of us, but he may have missed the miniature Alpine valley which suddenly presented itself where the map gave no hint of anything of the sort, a piece of ancient English magic if ever there was one.

It lies between Rogate and Liphook—perhaps I should be on safer ground if I said that on this particularly happy day it lay between those two points. You never can tell, with an English by-road, and some change in the air, the light, the weather, those tireless painters of the loveliness of England; may have turned it into a heath road, or just a way

between woods—or wiped it out altogether, as a painter rubs out an unwanted effect. At all events, it is worth going many miles in the hope of finding it looking as I found it.

Your way from Guildford should lie as follows. Take the Pulborough road as far as the turning to Dunsfold and



keep on to the right through Dunsfold and along the winding, baffling lanes to Chiddingfold. You will certainly get lost more than once, but each wrong turning, each stop for a puzzled study of the map (nothing less than a half-inch scale is safe for you) will be a gain. You will be in the heart of the border country, now in Sussex, now in Surrey, and only those minutes are wasted in which you are not using your eyes.

At Chiddingfold you join the road to Petworth, tarred and

trim, it is true, but taking you through such country as makes you indifferent to the ugliest of petrol stations, the lowest of mushroom bungalows. It is not these you see, but the woods and hills they so happily fail to spoil. All the way down to Petworth and beyond that ancient stronghold, with the walls of its house thrusting the very streets aside in the best medieval and baronial manner, to within a mile or so of Duncton, you look right and left upon some of the best of south England. It may be a road you know, but you recognize it only by its beauty, not by any detail of it. There are ten thousand of these, all different.

Just after crossing the railway, turn to the right, and make for Selham, Heyshott, and Midhurst. This is less likely to be crowded on a fine week-end day than the more direct way to Cowdray Park, and is, in any case, more in keeping with the character of the cruise, which is essentially one of surprise. From Midhurst you run west as far as Trotton, and immediately afterwards turn north into the enchanted corner which looked like an Alpine valley the other day. You go through Dangstein (where, in the name of all that's incredible, did they get that from?), Harting Combe, and Linch. It is all woods and hills and curving roads and matchless peace. Somewhere in the middle of it all there is a place called Queen's Corner. Was it a German princess who was responsible for this—and Dangstein? You will not care if it was a Hottentot queen. She had admirable taste.

The odd little hill-road comes out eventually at Liphook, but you need not join the homeward-bound multitude on the Portsmouth road. Take the road home by Shottermill and Haslemere, and come to the Godalming road at Milford with Hindhead on your left. It, too, is tarred and trim, but you will not mind. You will have for companionship the memory of that exquisite stretch between Trotton and Liphook, a thing of no distance at all but of immeasurable charm, and the sure knowledge that you will come again and again.



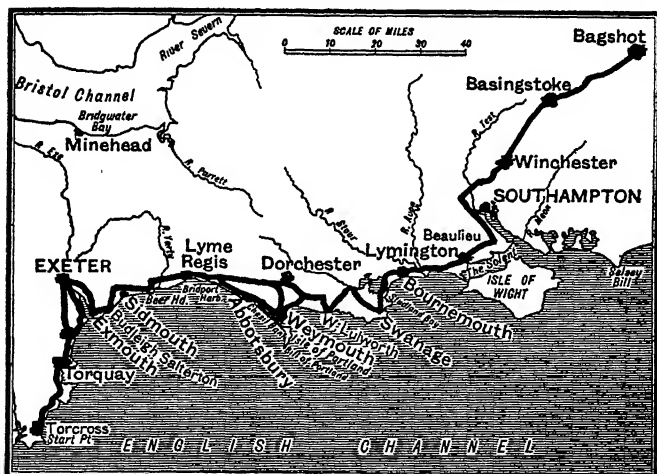
CHAPTER X

DORSET—KENNET, AVON, AND TEST—HAMPSHIRE—THE
MOST PEACEFUL PLACE IN THE WORLD

At least twice a year there comes upon every properly constituted lover of England the need to go into Dorset, the county which, above all others, combines solitude and exquisite scenery to an unmatched degree—perhaps a dangerous thing to say. For in nearly every county you will still find lonely roads in the most unexpected places and be able to enjoy beautiful country in peace and comfort. In Dorset you have something else. You have the lonely by-roads high up among the downs and by the sea, but the main roads, even those which run through the best of the valleys and hills and through the few towns, are often as empty. Perhaps it owes this matchless gift to its position, lying well off the main roads to the west, as much a back-water as Suffolk and Norfolk, if not more so; perhaps to its having only three seaside places with any pretensions to advertised popularity, and these many miles apart. Whatever the reason, it is a county specially to be singled out in spring and winter by those with a taste for wandering in a

haphazard way through very ancient England, caring nothing for direction or time, so long as they are left in peace.

And peace, deep and unruffled, is the peculiar charm of Dorset. For hours on end, between Crewkerne and the Isle of Purbeck, Shaftesbury and Lyme Regis, you can drive over hill and dale, down to the sea by precipitous ways, up again on to the heights and through the green levels, without ever losing that wonderful feeling that all



places within eyeshot are yours and that any one you may meet is only there by your special favour.

It may be selfish, it is certainly comforting, to reflect that you can spend a Saturday and Sunday in such surroundings without once having to be at the trouble of avoiding highways, and to be able to plan a cruise without the need for making detours. The towns of Dorset you pass through on a straightforward tour are all pleasant, real country towns, unspoilt, part of the picture. They occur at comfortable intervals, and you are glad to see them. You cannot say that of many others.

Lest you should think this an exaggeration, begin your wanderings in Dorset with Shaftesbury, but not actually from it. Take Gillingham as your starting-place and come down to the Sherborne road at East Stour and here turn to the left. This will bring you up the hill into Shaftesbury and show you how magnificently it is set in a high place, and when you have climbed up into the heart of the town you will see through the openings of the little streets on the right how it dominates the surrounding country. Every town without a river should have been built like Shaftesbury.

South-east lies Cranborne Chase, and you should begin the real business of the day by including its fringe on your way to Blandford. Leave Shaftesbury by the lower Salisbury road and take the second turning to the right. This brings you by Zigzag Hill on to Charlton Down, whence you look out over the Chase. You are pretty high up here, and though the surface of the road may not be all you would like, the climb is well worth while. You can come down again by way of Ashmore straight on to the Blandford road, or you can carry on to Tollard Royal and Handley, arriving at Blandford by the main Salisbury road. There is not much in it, but I prefer the former way because it runs through Fontmell Magna and Iwerne Minster. An alternative by-way, past the end of the Chase, runs parallel to it, having no villages on it between Melbury Abbas and Blandford—a distance of some nine miles.

After Blandford you will recognize the necessity for going to the Isle of Purbeck, in winter one of the loveliest places in the south. You have two ways of getting there; one, a long one, by the main road to Dorchester as far as Puddleton, where you turn back to the left by Tolpuddle and Bere Regis; the other, half the distance, by Spettisbury and Lytchett Matravers. The latter takes you by Sleeping Green, and both meet at Wareham, whence it is only four miles to Corfe Castle. From here keep on the Swanage

road till you come to Langton Matravers, and then turn sharp right and by Corfe again and Steeple, and a succession of narrow ways, some of them with gates to be opened and shut, renew your intimacy with the Purbeck Hills, and look again upon those wonderful views over sea and land.

On a fine day there are very few places to compare with the top of that razor-backed edge of downland for a place to pull up and sate yourself with English beauty. Arrange matters so that you arrive there when the sun is as high as ever it is at this time of year, lest you lose the best of the distance along that lovely coastline and over the valley of the Frome towards the hills in the north.

Then comes Lulworth and its cove, and you return to the high road over the hills again. It is a magnificent road that takes you into Dorchester and out again over the uplands by Winterborne Abbas to Bridport, and although it is the most insidious temptation to speed, wide, straight, and with just the right degree of ups and downs, take it slowly or you will miss a great deal. For a straight highway, running for the most part over naked downs, it has more beautiful things to see, near by as well as far away, than any I know in the British Isles. They are not things you can particularize, but a jumble of views, sudden as well as long-expected, which will keep you long in the silence of gratitude.

After Bridport, the character of the road changes and you come closer to the sea. Note Charmouth well, as a place for a home, and as you turn into the crooked street of Lyme Regis look upon it with new eyes. In summer it is crowded, but now it is as it was meant to be. It is your turning-point, and the road home leads you north by Hunter's Lodge to Axminster, Cricket St. Thomas, and the ridge called Windwhistle. You are momentarily out of Dorset hereabouts, and in Devon or Somerset, but roads are no

respecters of boundaries. The last stage to Shaftesbury takes you through Crewkerne, Yeovil, and Sherborne.

.

To hear any good spoken of the east wind is rare enough to rank as an event. Since it killed Charles Kingsley there cannot have been a single human, with a life to live out of doors, to do anything but curse it for the unique factor which can spoil a day in the open, from a day's fishing down to gardening. Everywhere, and in all circumstances but one, it is the universal cause of discomfort and a thoroughly atrabilious outlook on existence. To a motorist, hardened as he may be, it is the only wind that can keep him off the road. Yet in one specially lovely part of England this assassin scores over all its fellows, even the west wind. Over the hills which form the border between Somerset and Devon, and over the crimson cliffs which run eastwards from their end along the Dorset coast, it spreads a light and colour of a delicacy of which nobody could suspect it.

Perhaps this is only another example of the endless charm of the West Country, where it is next to impossible to find things anything but beautiful, where the motorist, from no matter what part of the world he may come, is always certain to rediscover for the thousandth time that he really knows nothing of the infinite variety of this happiest of hunting-grounds. However that may be, those who were inspired the last time that poisonous exhalation rose to drive their cars about the country where the Rivers Axe and Sid and Otter idle aimlessly to the sea must have a new conception of that appeal which, like the Nile waters, compels you always to go back to the country which is richer in colour than all the rest.

Where the east wind justified its dreadful existence was the country between Sherborne and Taunton, Sidmouth and Dorchester, and, of all the week-end drives from London

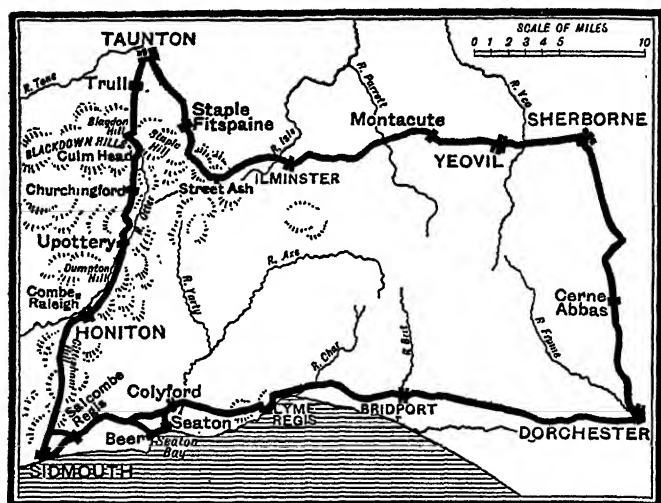
I have planned, I shall remember this as one of the very best. You get every sort of English scenery, from the green levels about the Yeo to the great hills, from the little valleys to the open downland and the Dorset coast, which most people will probably agree is the best in the country. And, incredible to relate, I got most of it entirely to myself. I could not this time avoid main roads, yet there seemed to be no more traffic on them than there would have been ten years ago. Perhaps I had to thank the east wind for a week-end of rare peace.

This is the route to be followed. From Sherborne take the road to Yeovil and Ilminster. This runs through the village of Montacute, where something was happening which you will not believe. In the street they were dancing. It was not jazz, but English country dances belonging to history. There were no men, and the dancers wore the print dresses and sunbonnets of the pictures. The music came from three fiddlers dressed in smocks, and they played from a haycart. Obviously, it was not a show (I was the only furriner present), but an ordinary Saturday jollification. So it is not yet true that ancient England is a museum piece, to be 'referred to' in books. Who said the smock disappeared fifty years ago?

A mile beyond Ilminster take the left fork at Horton and follow the Honiton road as far as the inn at the cross-roads three miles on. Here bear to the right and prepare for delay. You are in magnificent open country, eight hundred feet up, and you get a first impression of the generous scale on which these hills are arranged. Under the faint bright haze of that east wind they looked enormous, the distant summits taking on the air of mountains, while the view to the right, over the rich, placid levels of Somerset, seemed limitless. There must be no hurry hereabouts, and none on the next stage, after Taunton. You must go through the town and turn south again, or you will miss the

climb up Blagdon Hill to Culm Head, and that is inconceivable.

It is most inspiring, that swoop up from Blagdon, round the bends (one of them will surprise you, at the last moment, with a notable sharpness and a gradient of one in six) and up through the woods. It is real climbing, but the road is well graded and straightforward. For the next few miles



you are well over eight hundred feet up and you have the world to yourself, a world of light and air, brilliant with the gold of young gorse. Here you must spend a great deal of time, if you are not to waste any.

Down to Honiton you follow the River Otter, which lends its name to most of the villages it passes. Until you reach the main London road near Monkton you are always in wild country, running between the two main masses of the hills, and other cars are few and far between. You may come across more of them after Honiton, when you are climbing Gittisham Hill, but you will pay no attention

to them. For Gittisham Hill ranks even above Great Haldon, west of Exeter, for the immense expanse of country it shows you. Here was the east wind doing good work, doubling distance, throwing everything out of focus, playing magical tricks of all kinds. Far below on the right lay the Otter valley, apparently a dozen miles away, and between us rose the grim bulk of East Hill, standing up out of the evening haze like a promontory out of the sea. Distances were to be measured according to your mood, and to us it seemed as though we were looking across a range of mountains.

The homeward turn after Sidmouth begins with a series of precipitous hills by Salcombe Regis and Beer and Seaton, and from their summits you get a score of views of those astonishing red headlands which follow each other along the bay. Down in the sheltered coves rhododendrons were in full flower, and everywhere there was a smell and look of summer. You finish a memorable cruise by Bridport and a glorious twelve-mile run to Dorchester, high up above everything, with only the sky above you.

.

A suggestion for a day's run 'through quiet country for a little car', and, by the same post, a request from Salisbury for hints on how to find one's way about the highways and by-ways of Dorset, set me off one day on a new exploration of the hills that roll down to the sea from Taunton and up from it to Cranborne Chase and Salisbury Plain. I rediscovered old ways and found a number of new ones—new to me, that is to say—and realized once more for the hundredth time how singularly lucky are those who live within reach of this very English county.

It shares with Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, and Yorkshire that outstanding quality of imperturbable beauty which distinguishes those counties invariably described by their

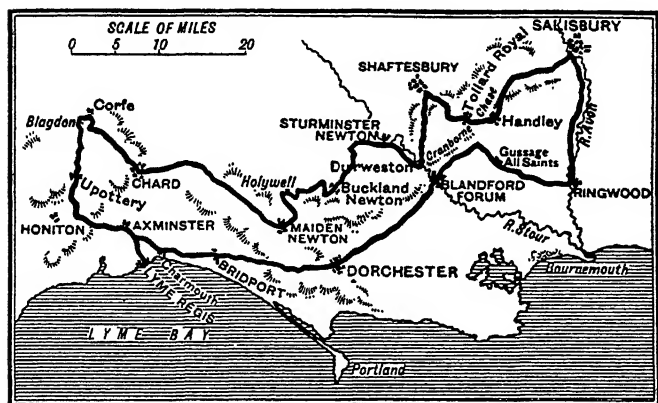
lovers as the heart of England. Geographically, Dorset has even less claim to the title than Yorkshire, but you will see along its highways as often as among its steep lanes that settled look which explains why people from other parts of England, even from the neighbouring counties, are spoken of and regarded as foreigners. It is a look impossible to analyse (and who can be foolish enough to waste the golden hours in trying to analyse or explain the beauty of England when he might be steeping himself in it?), but I dare say the old estates, the noble houses, the superb sweep of the hills clothed in just the right places with memorial timber dating back to the Restoration, the open downs above the sea, the oddly monastic names of some of the villages—all these have something to do with it.

The run I followed was largely along main roads, but it is one of the principal charms of Dorset that, out of holiday-time, most of its highways are comparatively empty. They do not lead to busy places, and they are well off the main stream of west-bound traffic. Between the New Forest and the Devonshire border lies a land of unbroken peace. They are fine roads, well made, planned with a Roman freedom, and you see as much of real Dorset from them as you do from their lesser fellows. Almost you can say that you get back to the days when the encounter with another car every ten miles was an event to be entered in the log you kept so carefully.

Take the road to Ringwood, through Fordingbridge, and along the edge of the New Forest, and then turn off to the right across Ashley Heath to meet the Salisbury-Dorchester road. It is a pleasant way, through woods and fields, and sets the pace for the day's run. There can be no hurry in Dorset. Soon after Horton you come to the first of the ecclesiastical place-names, the series of Gussages—Gussage All Saints and Gussage St. Michael—with Amen Corner and St. Andrew farther on. If you want more names for

your note-book (and everybody should compile a directory of English names), look on your right for Three-Legged Cross and Mainsail Haul. The latter is incredible but true.

You reach the main road at Cashmoor and then turn south-west for Blandford—that you may know you are in very old England, the survey map adds the word ‘Forum’ to it—and Dorchester. It is all plain sailing hereabouts, and the same sort of magnificent road leads you on to the



west, up over the smiling downs past Winterborne Abbas, and down the other side into Bridport and Charmouth, where you leave the sea and take to the heights by Raymond's Hill. If you prefer it you can go on a couple of miles into Lyme Regis and join the road at Hunter's Lodge, by way of Uplyme. Both roads lead you to Axminster, and when you have left this behind you come to the hills that are called, a few miles on, the Blackdown Hills. Saints and long-forgotten monks have left their names, or at least their 'marks', all about here, and, whether history says or not, it is obvious that this must have been a rich pasture for barons. There was something to harry.

Four miles out of Axminster bear to the right and take the fine road up Stockland Hill, which rises five hundred feet in three miles. It is a beautiful run and the climax, Culm Head, at the top of Blagdon Hill, is worth driving many a mile to enjoy. Within half a mile or so you get two superb views, over the Dorset hills and over the Vale of Taunton. At the hamlet of Blagdon turn to the right and find Corfe, turning again to the right for the return climb (seven hundred feet in two miles, this time) to Staple Hill, which is the eastern end of the Blackdowns. You are well up above the world now for the next six miles, and it is certain that you will forget all time-tables in that air and those rare solitudes.

That breezy road leads you to Combe St. Nicholas and Chard, and just off it you will find two more names for your records, Britty and Castle Neroche, the latter crowning a great hill amid woods, as is only right and proper. You dip into the valley at Chard for a mile and then climb up again along Windwhistle, another ridge above the world, whose name Tony Lumpkin unaccountably left out of the itinerary he gave Hastings. It is a great place.

Then comes Crewkerne and the Dorchester road, over the hills, as far as Maiden Newton, where, if you are wise and indifferent to winding, rough, and elusive ways, you will strike north for Holywell and then across the hills by Batcombe and Dogberry Gate, Middlemarsh, and Ridge Hill, skirting Buckland Newton and reaching Sturminster by Pulham and Kingstag. Keep to the right for Durweston, six miles on, and then take the delightful road to Shaftesbury by Iwerne Minster and Fontwell Magna. Just before you get to Shaftesbury turn to the right and go up to Charlton Down by Zigzag Hill. This gives you a last and beautiful outlook before you cross Cranborne Chase, by Tollard Royal and Handley, and come back to Salisbury through Broad Chalke and Stratford Toney. The distance of the

round trip from Salisbury is about 190 miles, and from London 362 miles.

.

For the motorist searching for quiet places there is nothing quite so private, quite so friendly as the fields about an English river. If peace is to be found anywhere these days—and mercifully there is a good deal left, if one knows where to look for it—it is by the banks of those streams which, as a rule, are happily remote from main roads. It is their unassuming size, their complete uselessness which puts the trout-rivers of England in a class by themselves, the class of blessed solitude. The show rivers, like the Thames, the lower stretches of the Wye, and the Derwent, suffer a good deal from over-popularity, but that is more probably because convenient roads accompany them than because they are beautiful. If they were difficult to reach and to follow, like some of the streams in the south, they would not be beauty spots, but beautiful places for deserving pilgrims.

The others are sometimes easy to approach, occasionally easy to follow for a short distance, but it needs patience and time to do them justice, and for those reasons an expedition among them makes a singularly pleasant summer week-end cruise. Among the fairest and the most accessible are the Hampshire Avon, the Kennet, and the Test, which obligingly flow north and south, east and west, in such a way as to make their exploration a fairly easy matter.

You begin with the Kennet, but as its last miles run through Newbury to Reading within sight and hearing of the Bath road, it is best to get into first touch with it near Kintbury, and follow it as closely as may be upstream through Hungerford. It is a typical trout-river, and nowhere is it lovelier than at Chilton Foliat. The road keeps it pretty close company through Ramsbury and Axford, to Marlborough and East Kennett, but thereafter to its source

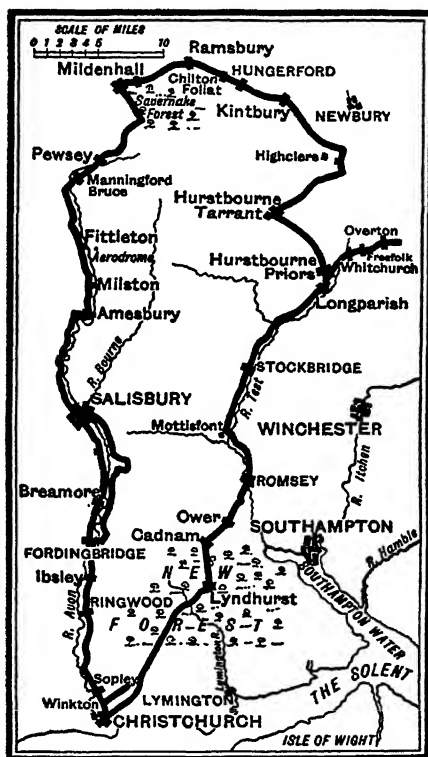
beyond Hackpen Hill it is hardly worth while pursuing. It is wiser to leave it and strike south to the Avon at Pewsey or Manningford Bruce and take the Salisbury road.

Two roads follow the Avon, and the choice is difficult. The upper road, on the west bank, gives you, perhaps, better sight of the river, but it is usually more crowded than the winding by-way on the other side, through Longstreet, Fittleton, and Milston. At Amesbury keep to the right-hand road, which runs close to the water's edge, by Durnford, Old Sarum, and Avon Bridge. From Salisbury to Ringwood you have again a choice of ways; but it is best, for once, to stick to the main road. It is exquisite country along the whole valley, the outskirts of the New Forest on your left making a noble background to the meadows which stretch out on either side of the river. Be prepared to halt very often and go exploring on foot, more particularly at Breamore, and Fordingbridge, and Ibsley.

You lose close touch for a little after Ringwood, but you are richly rewarded when you reach Tyrell's Ford and Sopley, and Winkton, where you will certainly be obliged to pay proper respect to this prince of peaceful streams, and spend a great deal of time doing it. You will decide that this is what you have been looking for for years.

Just outside Winkton the river leaves you for the sea at Christchurch, and unless you want to see the end under the walls of the priory (where there will certainly be many people), you must turn off to the left and cut across the New Forest to the Test. By enchanted by-ways you reach the Lyndhurst road, and then, through some of the best of the forest, come to Lyndhurst, Cadnam, Ower, and Romsey, where the river awaits you only five miles from the mouth. Take the Stockbridge road as far as Mottisfont station, and then bear left past the abbey and follow the western road as far as the little town. Then comes some of the best of the run by Leckford and Fullerton and Wher-

well to Whitchurch. All along here and where the river widens by Longparish there are a hundred things to see. Distance does not exist and time does not matter. You



will spend most of your time out of the car and in the tall grasses by the brink. There is a little road on the other side, a lane running from Middleton to Tufton, a matter of two miles. Leave your car and walk it, but be careful to see both sides of the water.

The Test rises somewhere a little east of Freefolk, I

believe in a pond by Quidhampton, above Overton, but I am not sure. In any case, you part from it at Whitchurch, and, returning as far as Hurstbourne Priors, make your way northward again to Kintbury by Hurstbourne Tarrant and Highclere. As far as Tarrant you have a little brook, a tributary of the Test, beside you, a small affair officially known as Bourne Rivulet.

.

It is difficult seriously to consider the seasons in England, from a motoring point of view. Obviously snow and fog set definite limits to one's schemes, and when day after day brings fresh tales of flooded and blocked roads one is tempted for a week or so to speak of spring, summer, and autumn as being better times of the year for touring than winter. Yet, away from ten-foot snowdrifts and submerged fields, it never seems to me to matter very much whether it is March, July, or any other month. The beauty of England is not a matter of seasons, but of climate. You must say of most southern countries that you see them at their best in summer, that in winter, when the weather appears to be warmer than at home, their character is lost. They depend upon the sunshine for the truth.

The English climate is responsible for the beauty of England almost as much as is the Irish for the indefinable loveliness of Ireland. England can be as beautiful in winter as in late spring, in autumn as in summer, and, using a small amount of common sense, you can tour as happily even in the piercing winds of March as in the sleepy breezes of June. There is a difference in the everlasting charm, but never a falling-off.

Of no part of England is this more true than that part of Hampshire which lies by the sea, overlooking the Isle of Wight to the south, on neighbourly terms with Dorset on the west and Sussex on the east. Consider what you have

before you. The New Forest, supreme patch of England where spring, summer, autumn, and winter merely mean a different colouring; the wooded hills above Petersfield; the valley of the Meon; and at least one corner of the Isle of Wight. The winds of March, even though they blow from the east, can do little to the country but show it up in a new light, nothing to you if you have the eye and the understanding heart. Hating the sea (incredible, but possible), you could not conceive England without it; tortured by the March gales, you accept them as you welcome the slow, scented winds of September. They belong.

It is good to be in the New Forest in March. Late or early as spring may be, there is always warmth and colour and life. It is a characteristic of the great wood which is not really of this world at all. I have seen the road between Romsey and Brockenhurst in December, when, but for the kind of clothes we were wearing, it might well have been either October or May. It is not a thing to be explained—only to be accepted with gratitude.

Take the road from Southampton to Beaulieu and Lymington by Lyndhurst. Later in the year you can dodge the crowds by Dibden Way, but now there are none. None even at Beaulieu, unless you fall on a fine Sunday, none all along that little road which takes you to Buckler's Hard, past Bergerie and the pond and into Lymington. Here you must perhaps pay serious attention to the weather, for if it is, in the seaman's sense, fair, you must take the little steamer to Yarmouth, the most peaceful as well as the most engaging place in Europe. Even in high summer the tiny town lies empty, indolent, drowsy as an Italian village after the tourists have landed and until they have re-embarked.

It has no street lamps and only four streets. One of these is a hundred and fifty yards long, and the other three about a third of that length. They meet at a carfax, where a very ancient church stands next to the shop that sells you a packet

of razor-blades, an anchor, a saucepan, a variety of ferocious knives, some nice steel rope, a hoe, and a lifebelt.

Where one of the streets ends there is a wooden jetty, at which modest, unwhistling steamers touch gently at long intervals. They come from the mainland, which, like all proper mainlands, is seen but not heard.

It is old and venerable, it has a castle, the remains of a governor's palace, it smells of tar and sea and woods. Its natives hold high discourse of little ships, but they do it, however passionately, in a subdued murmur, like horse-dealers. Their voices are easily drowned by the six-inch breakers whispering on the shingle under the yacht club.

There are three ways into it, one by way of the long street, one oversea, and one from the west. This last costs you money, because there is, or there was, the last time I was there, a toll-gate. Yet the one and sixpence we paid to drive through we counted as an investment paying the highest dividends.

There was a notice, giving the tariff for 'Coach, Stage Coach, Omnibus, Van, Caravan, Sociable, Berlin, Landau, Chariot, Vis-à-vis, Barouch (as spelt), Phaeton, Cabriolet, Calash, Curricule, Car, Chair, Gig, Hearse, Litter, Chaise, Waggon, Wain, Cart, or other like Carriage or Vehicle.'

It is probable that we did not come in under the heading 'Car', in the view of the original toll-keeper, and we were, for a while, divided between the attractions of chariot, calash, curricule, and sociable. Obviously gigs and chaises are two-seaters, which we were not; while no open car, which we were, is eligible as a berlin, a barouch, or a landau.

Were we a litter? It smacks of the Roman occupation, and of a leisureliness of transport unknown to-day.

At the proper time of year, when other places are a vile pandemonium of mechanical noise, Yarmouth carries on in matchless quiet. Once a day conversational crowds arrive and stay ten minutes, awaiting a meek steamer which comes

presently and takes them all away, and blessed noiselessness descends again for the remaining twenty-three and three-quarter hours of the golden day. And each of them you may safely count, in advance of the old Roman, as serene. Serene is Yarmouth, serene and tranquil.

Little boats silently up-anchor and sail matches on the sparkling water before you. You hear the six-inch breakers and sometimes the slap of a wavelet against a groyne. Now and again you catch the silken rustle of a tiny bow-wave, as No. 7, half-rater, skims by with a bone in her teeth—not a bone so much as a merrythought, so modest is the little break of foam under her forefoot.

The hills behind are noiseless except for the music of the wind in the copses. Quiet, too, are the lanes and fields about them, quiet and scented as are Corsica and Ceylon. Peace holds her mantle over all.

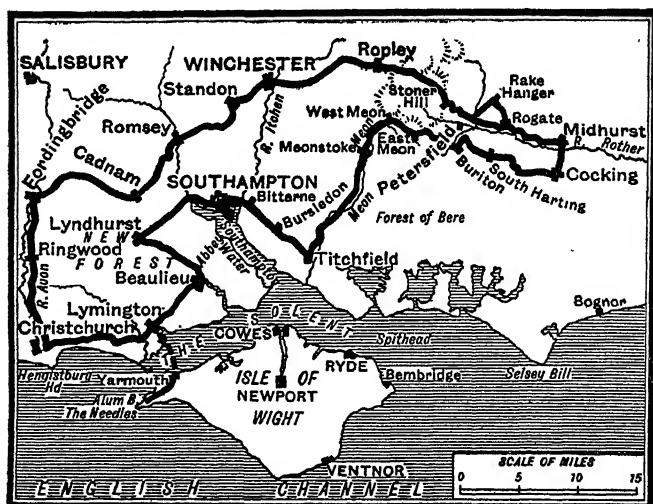
You come in your car from London and other Places of Noise along smooth roads, over swelling English hills, through a great magic wood down to a little river, so little that it is scarcely mentioned on the maps.

You come at dusk to the last stages of your journey, when there is an opal gleam on the dark water, and a smell of the farthest sea. And in a little while, thumping placidly across the channel, swaying ever so lightly to the swell of the distant Atlantic, you make the lights of Yarmouth—six, is it, or seven?

Much later, when the world is asleep, you hear, through your windows, perhaps even in your sleep, the coming of a great ship. While she is still very far away you hear the orderly turmoil of her engine-room telephoned to you through those drowsy waters, the throb and drive of her screws, faintly, lightly . . . loudly . . . her lights make patterns on your ceiling, a suspicion of green across them tells you she is homeward bound . . . with a whisper you would swear is the voice of the look-out man, high-perched

above the thrusting stem, she is gone. But her wash, a minute or two later, makes no end of a disturbance below, on the shingle.

Back on the mainland, carry on to Christchurch and the River Avon, and follow the placid stream through the rich meadows, already coming to life, past Fordingbridge, and then turn off to the right into the forest again to Cadnam.



In March you will not try to resist the appeal of Rufus's stone and Castle Malwood, and you will really see what really is a moving thing. It matters not at all whether Rufus was slain there so long as you think he was. History is notoriously inaccurate, and the best edition is always your own.

Turn north to Romsey, with its gracious bridge, and leaving the forest, come to Winchester and New Alresford, and that lovely downhead run which ends in the drop down through the beeches of Stoner Hill to Petersfield. You may know

that a March east wind is blowing just about here, but you will be too busy with the views on your left as you slide noiselessly down that twisting road to notice it. In Petersfield you turn on to the Portsmouth road and follow it for a mile to Sheet, and then turn off it to the right over Rake Common, by Rake Hanger, and over Rogate Common, where you get a wonderful illusion of height and far-away horizons. Rogate Common is one of the best things in England.

Keep on till you get to Midhurst, and then turn south to Cocking and take the road to Elsted and South Harting. A winding lonely road brings you by Nursted and Buriton, under Ramsdean Down (which is Butser Hill in disguise), to East Meon, where you enter the Meon valley. It is a tiny valley, scarcely more than the edge of a stream, though quite respectably high downs lie north and south of it, but it has a very special charm. By West Meon and Meonstoke, Droxford, and the woods before Wickham, you will feel it and see it and be at a loss to define it. It is, like so many bits of ancient England, very private, very apart. It makes a very fitting close to your special March tour in Hampshire, when you have it all to yourself. You come back to Southampton by Titchfield, Bursledon, and the bridge, well satisfied that you have had the best as well as the better of March in England.



PART V
EAST



CHAPTER XI

IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE—TO THE CONSTABLE COUNTRY—
ESSEX AND SUFFOLK—KENT

OF all England, sang Rupert Brooke, Cambridgeshire is the one shire for Men who Understand. Not every one will agree with him on the question of this supreme place being awarded to the flattest county we have, but all who explore its by-ways and villages, being careful to steer clear of towns, will thenceforward count themselves among those who understand, and answer to its elusive appeal. Seen from a train or even from the Great North Road, Cambridgeshire hides the quiet charm which gave us that very English poem, *Grantchester*, under a mask of almost unrelieved dullness. You must go by side-road and slowly, constantly retracing your wheel-tracks and as constantly turning off to right and left, forgetful of time and place, if you want to understand.

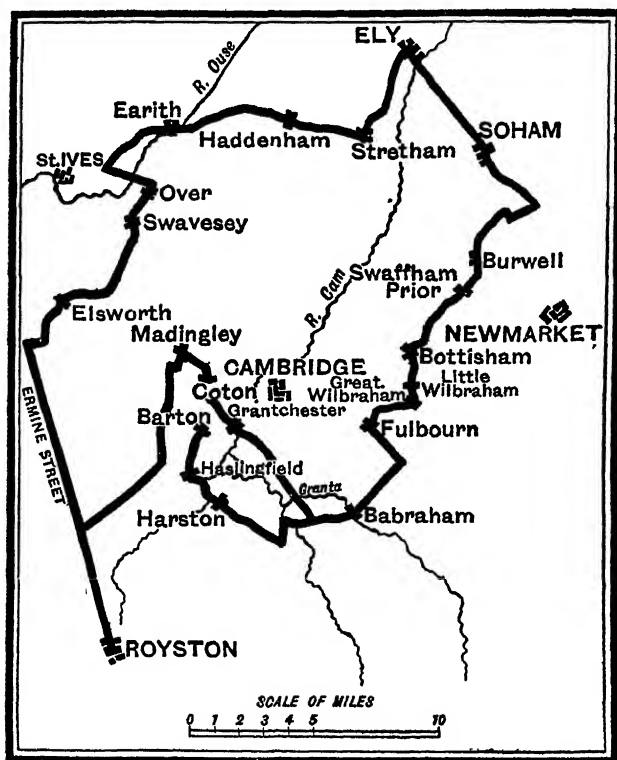
It is a peculiar fact that flat country, especially in England, often conceals things as beautiful in their way as the more resplendent wonders of the hills and woods and valleys. Essex, parts of Norfolk, the Lincolnshire Fens, and the last miles of Kent are examples in point. You must look for them, which may, of course, add to their attractions when

found, but your reward is always great. To spend a day or two searching Cambridgeshire for its well-hidden beauty spots is to give yourself a succession of delightful surprises. As you discover village after village, lying lost in that great expanse of mead and field, you will for the thousandth time swear never to listen to those who call any part of England dull.

Rupert Brooke's Cambridgeshire makes a particularly satisfactory county to explore in winter. Grey clouds may hide 'the Cambridge sky', but nothing except fog will avail to dim the peculiar brightness which this peaceful county shares with Norfolk. It is full of light, perhaps, because its woods are far scattered, and there is never a hill to swear to till you are on it; perhaps because, although you are often practically at sea-level, you always have a wide expanse before you, and a long line of woods three or four miles away gives you a sense of immense distance, a feeling of being in big country. Whatever the reason, I know few better places in all England for the leisurely traveller, with a greedy eye, than the quiet spaces north, east, and west of Cambridge in February.

Royston, where men 'are black and fierce and strange of mouth', makes a good starting-point. Here take the Huntingdon road as far as Caxton Gibbett and turn off to the right where a signpost shows the way to Cambridge. Be prepared, at the first turn to the left, for narrow, muddy lanes and a very leisurely rate of progress, and so, with patience, come through Elsworth and Swavesey to Over, where they fling oaths at you, according to the poet, and the road from St. Ives to Ely. That is a curious road across the fens, probably the lowest in England. A mile or so beyond Earith the sea is some thirty miles from you, at its nearest point, and you are eleven feet above it. It is not surprising that Haddenham, dizzily perched on a magnificent eminence of 122 feet, looks like a mountain town. When you

have left Little Thetford and come in sight of Ely Cathedral the towers of that great, cold church stand up out of the grey and green like the Pyramids.



Ely is your turning-point, and to finish the circle about the country that has been immortalized you come south to Soham and Fordham and then, abandoning yourself once more to dubious by-ways, steer a very tricky course through Burwell, past Swaffham Priory, Bottisham, and Little and Great Wilbraham, to the Newmarket road a couple of miles

south of Fulbourn. From here you can, with a proper map, wander happily among all Brooke's villages: Babraham, where certain events unspecified caused strong men to weep; Harston, where no girls are under thirty; Barton, famed for Cockney rhymes; Haslingfield, of the meads; Madingley, where things are done you'd not believe, on Christmas Eve—and Grantchester, Grantchester, where, in a garden, black and white, a hundred vicars spectral dance, before the dawn, and oft between the boughs is seen the sly shade of a rural dean. 'A bosky wood, a slumbrous stream, and little kindly winds that creep round twilight corners, half asleep.'

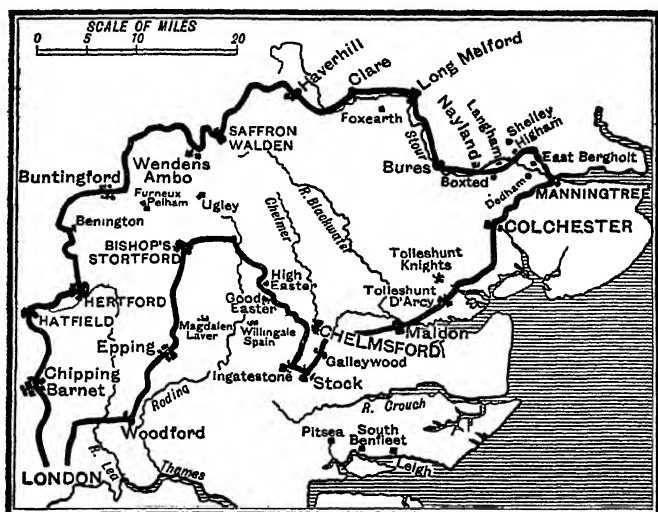
It is, indeed, a place of 'quiet kind', this drowsy backwater off the king's highway. Utter peace reigns in those fields and in the tiny village streets, such peace it is worth driving many miles to feel. That little family of hamlets, clustered near the only rising ground for miles, is an island of dreaming rest, far out of earshot of the noise of that world which has Cambridge for its centre. With Brooke you may like Grantchester the best, but your winding path among the others will give you a new delight. It is all very well worth while, for it is a scrap of English England.

.

It is hard to decide. Would you have Essex and the parts towards Ipswich raised by, say, five hundred or a thousand feet, or would you leave it as it is, well on the level of that corner of the North Sea which is the saddest of them all in winter? It is so beautiful and rare a county, when you come to know it apart from its dreadful highways. It has such enchanting surprises for you hidden in its countless lanes. It so richly rewards the traveller who forces his way out of the ugliest traffic-stream in Europe, the Southend arterial road, that you feel towards it as you do towards a perfect little picture suddenly discovered in the

lumber-room, thick with dust, forgotten for a hundred years. You are greatly moved by your find, but you have an unaccountable delicacy—unless, of course, you are a dealer—in bringing it into the crude day.

If you leave Essex as it is, you must endure its frequent extinction in fog and that peculiar brand of dirty weather which seems always to accompany a south-east wind in



England—dark, damp cold, with hardly more health in it than an undiluted east wind—which is less than none. Geographically, this may be correct, but you may find, as I do, that the local lack of colour is overdone. In bright weather I would not have anything changed; but when that grey blight wells up from the sea and leaves me with a view-limit of about a hundred yards, I imagine to myself how swiftly and expensively a British Mussolini would deal with so elementary a problem, how magnificent it would be to have some of the most secret and exquisite miniatures

of ancient England brought out, like my picture or the treasures of Tutankhamen, into the light of day.

And then one remembers that the treasures of Tutankhamen and other well-educated monarchs can be seen by the entire gaping world in the Boulak Museum for a shilling a time, and there is no mystery left; in Essex, perhaps, when you think of the perilous nearness of the Southend road, no charm. It is far too great a risk. Better wait a year to see forgotten Essex by yourself than go down when it is convenient and find it like Broadway in the Cotswolds—so ‘period’ that the whole thing smells of Wardour Street. Let us leave Essex alone and spend the taxpayers’ money on something less dangerous.

So I thought the last time I wandered through it on my way to the Constable country in search of a peaceful drive, clear of Christmas holiday traffic.

My objective was Long Melford and Bures and Langham Mill and East Bergholt, all lumped into one, all at the end of the road to Colchester. So I went the other way, as you should. Go first to Hatfield, along the old road, and then take the road to Hertford, where you turn off north to Watton-at-Stone (you will have some names for your note-book before the day is done), and Bennington, a village for which I have a special affection. It is very old, and it wears its years with the utmost dignity. The road swerves to the left, and then carries you over what they call hills in this part of the world to Buntingford, another admirable introducer to the peace that lies beyond.

You join the main road at Wenden Ambo for Saffron Walden, and then go eastward to Haverhill and Clare and Long Melford, not forgetting that between the last two lies a place called Larks-in-the-Wood, to my simple mind the most beautiful place-name in the world. During the day you will pass through, or close to, such marvels as Willingdale Spain, South Gibcrack, Mellow Pingess, Porridge-pot

Hall, a brook called Roman River, Thrushes Bush, Colne Engaine, and Stow Maries. There are also, not quite so obvious, Emperors' Green (in the name of all that's incomprehensible about England, what emperors? The Allied Sufferings, as the waiter told Captain Dobbin at the Tavistock Hotel? I can remember no moment when Napoleon had a good enough 'Press' to get a village green called after him), and Roman Fee.

At Long Melford you turn south along the Stour and keep in touch with it as far as the end of the Constable country. They are charming roads by Bures and Langham Mill to East Bergholt, but fame seems to me to have tarnished them a little. Sitters to a great painter are never quite the same afterwards.

Your homeward way lies through Manningtree, and, unfortunately, Colchester, but thereafter you come into the really quiet places. Take the road to Maldon through Tolleshunt D'Arcy, and before you reach Chelmsford, take the left-hand road through Galleywood to Stock and across country to Ingatestone. Here is charm for you in miniature, little views, little hills, all on a small scale, all beguiling. It is more than worth your while to come round this way and through Writtle, as it all makes a proper foreground to the Easters, High and Good, which are perhaps the heart of untouched Essex. You will find the old roads a crazy patchwork, and you can only find your way out by asking—and that will delight you, for the extremely sensible natives have the manners of a forgotten age.

In the end you come to Bishop's Stortford, and the run home through Epping Forest. The way to the West End of London is very well sign-posted and needs no description.

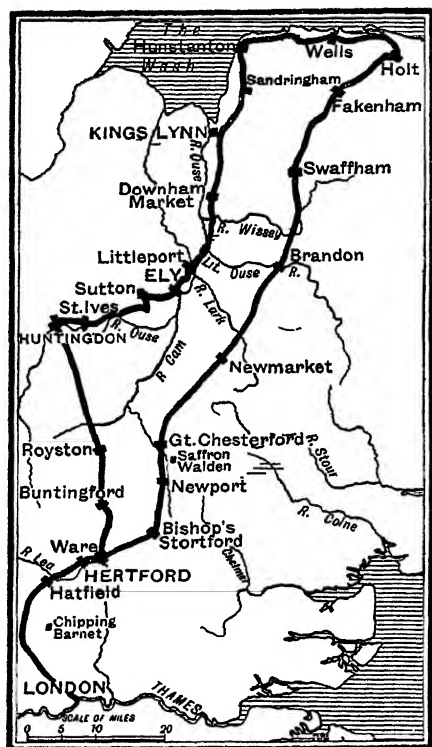
.

Only in rather special circumstances do straight roads appeal to the ordinary motor wanderer in his search for

quiet places. As a general rule they are ugly in themselves, and when they are bordered by trees only in patches, they undoubtedly tend to spoil the landscape through which they are cut. One must except French national roads, not because they are particularly beautiful, but because one expects them. They are part of the picture and one can scarcely imagine France without them. In any case they have, in their magnificent sentinel poplars, an attraction of their own which no other straight highways possess. There are very few perfectly straight roads in England, or at all events only short stretches of them, and for the most part one is very glad to get off them, not so much because of the traffic on them as because nowadays they are so hideously efficient, so wonderfully kept, and so very much like by-passes or racing tracks. They do not seem to be an essential part of English scenery.

One of the exceptions is the superb road which runs from Great Chesterford almost to the edge of the North Sea at the top of Norfolk. For over sixty miles—an immense distance in England—this road runs as straight as if it had been drawn with a ruler. It is not really straight, of course, but its very mild windings, which chiefly happen near the towns it crosses, serve only to accentuate its straightness in the open. There are many miles across the levels where it runs without any accompanying trees, but for some odd reason that does not detract from its charm. Between Newmarket and Swaffham, where it is a main road with the character of a by-road, such timber as borders it seems to have nothing to do with it, to have been there long before the road was built. It is a road on which you can drive extremely fast if the spirit moves you, but also one along which you are far more likely to be tempted to dawdle. You can, I suppose, average thirty-five or forty miles an hour between Newmarket and Fakenham, and it may be that when you first see its inviting length stretching before you,

the love of speed which lies in all of us may tempt you to keep your foot down on the accelerator pedal. But it will not be for long. This long, straight road, on which high



speeds should nearly always be perfectly safe, is much too attractive to be hurried over.

A very pleasant Saturday-to-Sunday tour, which includes this fine highway, can be planned as follows. Leave London by the Barnet by-pass, making Hatfield your real point of departure, and find a perfect introduction to the open road

along the winding ways which lead you through Hertford and Ware, Bishop's Stortford and Newport. These twenty-five odd miles of winding roads are particularly beautiful just now in their autumn colouring. It is always a surprise to me that there is so little traffic along them, for that patch on the borders of Essex and Suffolk, Hertfordshire and Cambridge, is one of the most delightful bits of real country within fifty miles of London, and its charm is greatly increased by the knowledge that only a few miles away, to right and left, lie the hideous roaring arteries which carry ceaseless traffic to the north and east. Although it is low country, the gentle rise and fall of the ground constantly gives you exquisite little views over big distances. Until you reach Great Chesterford your average speed will be extremely low. You will be eternally stopping and wondering afresh how you could possibly have missed such a friendly little bit of country all these years. You may not, of course, have missed it at all, but its beauty is of that precious kind, like that of so much of England, which is never the same.

The change when you come out on to that great road is startling. Trim fields and hedges, tidy spinneys and ordered landscape, give way to the real wild. Your car runs between pines and firs, twisted into weird shapes by the big winter winds, through bracken and heather and all the agreeable things which grow in open spaces. Ever there stretches across the horizon a line of enormous woods, and, although from time to time you reach them and pass through them, you seem always to be miles away from them. It is all flat country and the road runs level through it, yet you can see so far on either hand into the blue distance that it might be several hundred feet above the sea-level. That is one of the reasons why you will very soon bring the speed indicator needle back to modest figures. Mile after mile you run through that great expanse of open country, revelling

in the peace and solitude and marvelling anew at the infinite variety of English scenery.

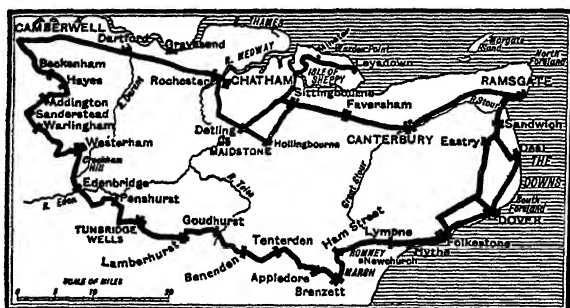
At Fakenham turn to the right and make for Holt and then northward on to the road which runs round the coast from Mundesley to Wells and Hunstanton, and come down through the magnificent woods of Sandringham to King's Lynn and into the cheerful country of which Downham Market is the centre. Almost immediately afterwards the scenery changes again and the road to Littleport and Ely runs alongside the Fens, where you find another kind of solitude. The last few miles into Ely, where you meet the Little Ouse and the Lark, are extraordinarily peaceful, and, if you are lucky in arriving at Ely on a fine hazy evening, you will be convinced that there is nothing more beautiful for the end of the day's run. From Ely follow the Huntingdon road through Sutton, Earith, and St. Ives, where you cross the famous bridge on which the chapel stands and then turn down the road to Royston and Buntingford, which will bring you back to Hertford and Hatfield.

.

How it got the exceedingly ambitious name of the Garden of England, whether it has claims to it superior to those which might equally be put forward by a dozen other English counties, are questions you might ask yourself before starting out to explore Kent with only the superficial knowledge of it yielded by its main roads, but at the end of a week-end's quiet cruise through the part you do not see from the Maidstone and Dover roads you may disagree with the description but you cannot possibly dispute the intention. Between Rochester and Dover, Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells, lies some of the loveliest scenery in the south, and much of it is undeniably of the garden kind—that is to say, it is not only wonderfully set out, almost with the ordered

precision of a Japanese garden, but it is peculiarly private. You have the exquisite sensations of a trespasser.

The North Downs wall most of it in to the north, leaving only the Isle of Sheppey and the country of the Cinque Ports outside, and on the west the hill country from St. Leonard's Forest to Cranbrook help them to make the gracious valley which begins by Edenbridge and runs out into Romney Marsh, fittingly bounded by Dymchurch Wall and the Straits of Dover. You have woods and hills in plenty, marshland and plains, sea-roads and hidden



valleys, here joining forces, there standing apart, and in the two lazy days' driving you should allow yourself at this time of year you get a variety of scenery hardly exceeded, for the size of the county, in Devonshire or Yorkshire.

At first, on the outward run, you have it all plain sailing, too plain, you will say, to suggest any idea of gardens, but after you have passed Rochester and the road from Sittingbourne to Ramsgate, you enter and wander happily through just the sort of country you would choose for a winter's run. Down by the sea you may get into patches of mist, particularly about Romney Marsh, but even that manages to add to the beauty of the place. Except on the down-heads and on the cliffs the Kentish views are all short. You see a great deal in a small compass, and it is only when you

come to measure distances on the map, and not with your eye, that you discover why the comparison with a garden in Japan is not so wild as it sounds. The silver mist which on some days hovers over the marshlands serves only to heighten the impression of distance. It softens, but does not veil.

For the Londoner the starting and finishing point is, conveniently, Camberwell Green, comfortably and easily reached from Westminster Bridge. On the outward journey you keep to the left and find the new road, which takes you past, but not through, Dartford and Gravesend and straight down to Rochester. Here you take the road to the left, which avoids Chatham, and come to the first of the hills, on the way to Maidstone. It is not really high, but by the time you have reached the Bell Inn you have a view to your right over the valley of the Medway, which makes you think in thousands of feet instead of in hundreds. A place for a halt.

There is a little side-road two miles short of Maidstone, which will save your going through the town and enables you to join the road to Sheppey a mile or so south of Detling. At once you climb over the North Downs through pleasant country, till you reach the main road near Sittingbourne. An alternative way, equally satisfactory—Kent is full of alternatives—is to keep along the edge of the Downs from Detling till you reach Hollingbourne, and there turn left up the hill. This takes you past the place called Morning Dawn, a name which you may, or may not, think more beautiful than Shadoxhurst, a few miles away.

Do not be persuaded to leave out Sheppey. It is true that you have only two roads to follow once there, but the dozen miles you drive are very rewarding. You have Minster, with its memorials to doubtless turbulent barons, dead these six centuries and more, and a look out, from Warden Point and Leysdown, over the passage which most

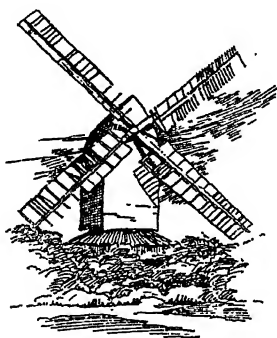
of the ships of England must sail to make London Port. That alone is well worth while, more so even than the forgotten barons of Minster.

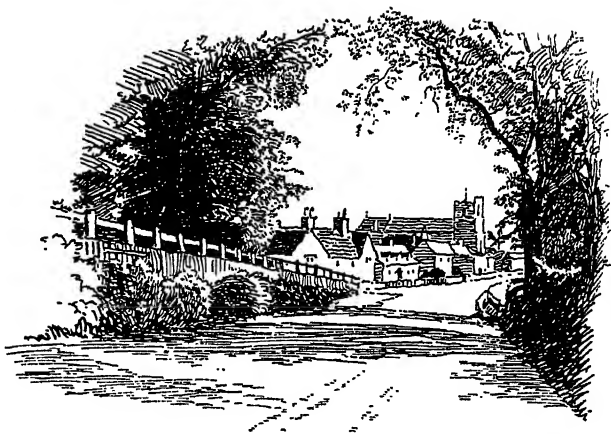
From the island to Canterbury is more very plain sailing, but thereafter the road across Thanet will delight you on a fine day. It has no height greater than an Atlantic wave, but you can see all round you for miles. You skirt Ramsgate, if you like, though the little harbour is a joy for those who take pleasure in these things, and follow the road to Sandwich. Here you have the choice of a short way to the Dover road, by Eastry, and a longer one through Deal and Dover. Be wise and take the latter, for it gives you Walmer Castle, one of the most enviable sea-houses in the world, and the run to the top of the big cliffs, above the Foreland, whence you look down on France and the ships.

You have both all the way to the cliff above Folkestone, and you only turn your back on them after you have come down the big hill and taken the road to Lympne. From here to Ham Street and down to Brenzett you run by Romney Marsh, with friendly woods on your right and the most mysterious place in England on your left. Go down into it, if you like, and picture the Dymchurch Flit. That, too, is worth while, and you can get back to the land from which the Little People fled by way of Newchurch, that solitary hamlet, stranded in the middle of a waste place which you know to have many more inhabitants than you can see—unless they wish you to.

After the Marsh comes Appledore and Tenterden and new wooded country by Benenden and Goudhurst. At the cross-roads near Lamberhurst keep to the left and avoid the streets of Tunbridge Wells by the road which passes Frant station and joins the East Grinstead road just outside the town. Take the first reasonable turning to the right and go to Penshurst, most typical of the Garden of England, and then through the woods to Markbeece, where you

make for Edenbridge. At the next fork bear to the right, for the sake of Crockham Hill, the delightful little hill-road to French Street, and the woods above, and in Westerham turn westwards for two miles and finish the run up Titsey Hill. The road through Warlingham, Sanderstead, Addington, and Hayes Common will bring you to Beckenham and Dulwich, and so back to Camberwell Green.





CHAPTER XII

LINCOLNSHIRE—NORFOLK—KENT—ESSEX

THE seeker after perfect solitude—yearly, even monthly, more difficult to find—can scarcely do better in winter than to look for it among the Lincolnshire Fens. To the new-comer they sound unquestionably depressing. There is no getting away from that. It is an illusion, of course, as are so many traditional descriptions of the less familiar places in the world, but it is one very firmly established. Whether it is due to the fact that nearly the whole of the second largest county in England is a backwater, remote from the main stream of traffic-life—even more so than Suffolk and Norfolk—and that, in consequence, it amounts to an island, or whether the effect of Dickens's novel is still at work, it is impossible to say. Whatever the reason may be for the general reluctance of the motoring explorer to take his car into that curious part of the world, it is wholly insufficient.

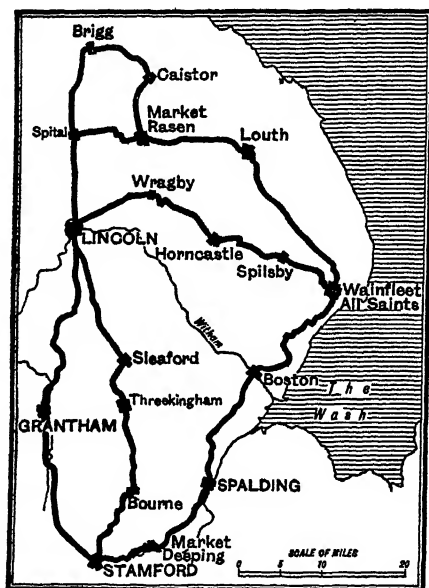
To say that the Lincoln Fens have an attraction all their own is to tell only half the story. No other country-side

like it, if such exists, could possibly rival it. It is, for hundreds of square miles, so absolutely flat, of a colour and contour apparently so absolutely uniform, that it defies description. You cannot, as you study the map in advance, hope for anything among those odd squares and rectangles that mark the boundaries of each separate fen except a general impression of a large expanse of earth where there has lately been water. Except for a narrow strip running up from the Shires to a point near Lincoln, and a more generous patch between Caister and Louth and Horn-castle, the whole county seems obviously at or more likely below sea-level. Add to this the circumstance that the sea in question is the North Sea, the coldest, ugliest, and most disliked, and the reluctant adventurer may be forgiven his timidity.

The facts are very different, as every one knows who has driven through that flat land, whether in bright or dull weather, in summer or in winter. It is, as I said, a curious place, and, for its very oddness, one that keeps you constantly on the look out for something new and strange. You are constantly finding it. You look for nothing but a hueless waste, and you enter upon a world of delicate colour. The most vigorous paints are the green of the salted turf, the dead black of the dikes' sides and the silver of the sky. All that flatness is bathed in such a light as you will hardly find equalled anywhere in the British Isles, except, perhaps, in the south-west of Ireland. It is always bright, always unbelievably soft. Those Fens take the first rasp of the east wind, in which you would not suppose anything could remain soft and survive, yet their features remind you quite definitely—or me, at any rate—of the Irish bogs, where the winds are nearly always friendly.

As you drive up north from Stamford and Bourne to Sleaford, or, by the Great North Road, through Grantham, and on to Lincoln, you pass a score of fens, each as

meticulously labelled as the 'Heaths' that succeed them near Lincoln. Never was there such a tidy land. Think of the chessboard country over which Alice and the Red Queen travelled so disappointingly, and you will get an idea of the exactitude of the Fens. And the place-names are enchanting—Threekingham, Aslackby, Helpringham,



Boothby Graffoe—and, in the wooded 'uplands' east of the Fens themselves, Londonthorpe, Burton Coggles, and—Ingoldsby. Is it not worth crossing England for these alone?

Of the two ways, I prefer the eastern, by Aslackby and Sleaford, only because it runs alongside the Fens. The other, by Grantham and Carlton Scroop, may seem more generally attractive, but it lacks the local colour. At Lincoln, the most surprising town in England, as well as the

one with the finest setting and background, you have a large choice of roads, and it does not matter very much which you follow, provided you arrange to come eventually to the edge of the sea near Wainfleet, and finish the run through the southern fens. If you have the time, take the road straight on, if not as far as Brigg at least to Caenby Corner. (Why, you will ask, in the name of all that is most wonderful in England, should there be a Celtic form on the east side?) The road is nothing less than the Ermine Street, which you probably last saw in the Cotswolds.

If you go on to Brigg, along the nine straightest miles in the kingdom, you come back south through Caister and Market Rasen, turning eastwards again for Louth. Here you cross the most important 'range' in the Fen country, the gentle swell in the ground, rising perhaps to as much as four hundred feet above the sea, which looms so importantly and picturesquely above the flats on either side. If you lack the time, you go due east to Wragby and come down over the end of the 'range', by Horncastle to Spilsby and Wainfleet.

Between Wainfleet and Boston you get, along one of the most extraordinary roads in the world, a final and lasting memory of the Fens. You are involved in a maze of them, a maze that is all squares and angles instead of, as is more usual, in mazes, circles, and bends. On your left, less than a couple of miles away, is the North Sea, from which all this strange country was salvaged. There are times when the conquest seems not too secure, the despoiled sea not yet repatriated. Sea-level is really sea-level in this part of the world.

The last of your journey takes you through Boston, least spoilt of all old stranded ports, Spalding, and Market Deeping. Never mind about the last two, but keep all your daylight hours for Boston. It is like something in a dream, not specially beautiful, but with a charm that tugs at your

memory long after you have seen the last of its barge-fleet. Nobody can say why.

.

If it is sunshine you need, blue skies, and the appearance of summer many weeks before you are likely to have the real thing, you must turn your car's wheels in the last direction you would choose unless you have been there before. There cannot be many parts of England south of the Midlands which are colder than Norfolk, colder, that is to say, from Fahrenheit's point of view. It is a pleasant, open-faced county, with a good deal of colour if you know where to look for it, some agreeable pieces of water, and a number of places where you can find comforting solitude, but it lies defenceless under the scourge of the winds off the North Sea. There should be nowhere south of the Border where it is easier to remain really cold for six months of the year.

Yet the cold is nearly always more apparent than real—certainly less real and infinitely less obnoxious than the penetrating chill you meet on a day of early spring at the edge of the Channel or on most of the length of the Thames Valley. Myself the most miserable of humans on this side of the Mediterranean between October and June, I have passed whole winters in East Norfolk marvelling at what I thought must be a season gone wrong. There can be no actual warmth in that pale sunshine, nothing but cold glitter in that blue sky, but the fact remains that the grimness of English winter is little more felt between Lowestoft and the Wash than it is at Falmouth.

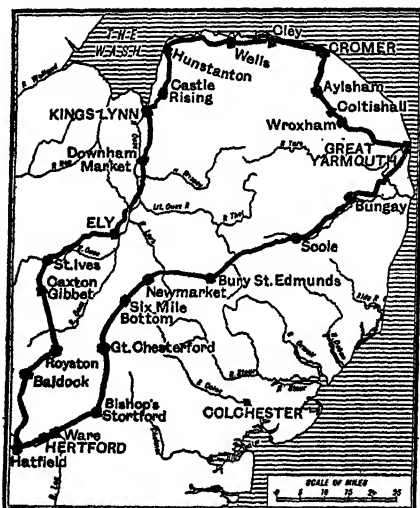
It may require courage, after weeks of east wind and drought, to set out for a week-end cruise straight into the eye of that very wind, but it is well worth the supreme effort, as I have often found out for myself, particularly if you take the coldest way first. As you drive north and

east through the bleak flats of Cambridgeshire and come closer, mile by mile, to the Wash, it becomes comfortably obvious that the worst is nothing like so bad as you expected it to be. And, in fact, the worst is well over by the time you have left Ely and King's Lynn behind and have gained the generous shelter of the woods about Sandringham. Whatever the thermometer may say, you are already indifferent to its conclusions. The day may be very cold, but you are not.

For a starting-point take Hatfield, reaching it either by the Watford by-pass or by the old direct road. When it is in decent condition I much prefer the latter, if only for sentimental reasons. The old ways of London are always worth retracing for memory's sake, and often for comfort. Witness the new peace of the way to the Bath road by Hounslow and the abandoned village of Colnbrook. You join the Great North Road at Welwyn, or thereabouts (I am never sure exactly where the old ends and the new begins), and follow it to Baldock. Your next objective is St. Ives, and the pleasantest way is by Royston and Caxton on the Huntingdon road. After the gibbet at the cross-roads north of Caxton you take the next to the right, about a mile on.

You are now in the flattest and perhaps the most exposed part of all England, not excepting even Lincolnshire, but unless you are very unlucky in your day you will find the March winds that blow across it hardly worse than invigorating. Already the sky is brighter and you recognize, in the light over the ancient bridge of St. Ives and the menacing bulk of Ely Cathedral, the certain promise of spring. It is an odd road between St. Ives and Downham, skirting the invisible Isle of Ely. You would not perhaps say that it is beautiful but, you are perfectly well aware, it deserves that you should. It runs through peaceful, unspoilt country.

At King's Lynn there are two ways north. Take the western one, past Castle Rising and Sandringham woods. It means that you must go through Hunstanton (unless you think it worth while making the detour through Sedgeford and Ringstead), but it is so much better than the other, by Docketing, that you should not hesitate. After Hunstanton you have the emptiest, friendliest coast road in all England, through the marshes and beside the estuaries of Brancaster



and Holkham Bays, past Wells-next-the-Sea and Stiffkey, Cley and Salthouse—names that could only belong to places where the most important inhabitants are the wildfowl, and the chief landmarks well-tarred boats lying bottom-up on the shingle. A little farther inland the great square church towers take precedence in the scenery.

Turn south at Cromer and take the road to the Broads by Aylsham, Coltishall, and Wroxham. They do not lie conveniently on your road, but with a good map you can find your way. Eventually, probably from Hickling, you

will arrive at Yarmouth and be reminded once more of what a fine expanse is Breydon Water. Here you leave the sea again and make your way homewards by Beccles and Bungay, whence a fine road leads you by Scole to Bury St. Edmunds and Newmarket. Take the left-hand road at the famous fork beyond the Heath and come back south through Great Chesterford and Bishop's Stortford, instead of by Cambridge and Royston. The road to Hatfield and London lies past Ware.

.

The peace-loving motorist in search of a quiet spot will rarely be disappointed if he looks for that placid solitude in Romney Marsh, for example. It is one of the strangest places in England. Weather seems to have very little to do with its mood. On a magnificent day of sunshine in June it may look perfectly lifeless, as nearly as possible colourless, and, frankly speaking, of no interest at all. If it has any secrets to conceal, they are buried deep below that expressionless waste.

On a winter's day, when the hills and woods to the north of it and the higher levels all round are as nearly featureless as it is possible for English scenery to be, as often as not you will find that Romney Marsh is alive. There is no explaining the meaning of this strange winter life, but the moment you set eyes on it you are aware of it. It seems as if you had come to a place which always keeps its own climate. Even if it is raining or blowing there is always something to expect as you drive along those zig-zagging roads. Is it possible that the Little People did not leave for good after all, or that after the Flit they found themselves ill at ease on the other side of the Channel, and came back to settle down where they had been at home obviously since the beginning of time? When you have spent an hour or two in the Marsh you are ready to believe

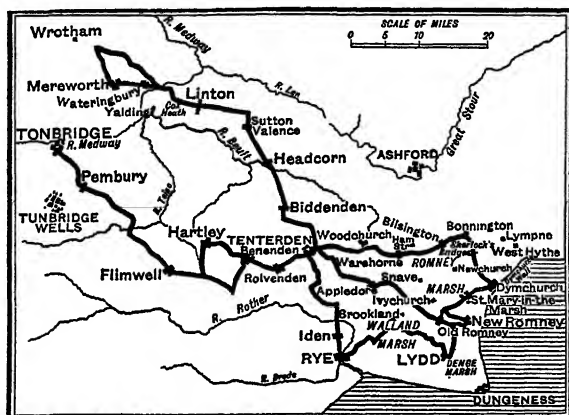
anything. England is full of places and things for which there is no explanation, and Romney Marsh is certainly one of them.

From autumn to summer practically all the odd little roads in that strange square will generally be empty. To the north lie the pleasant woods which reach up to the North Downs and to the south the sea, which, although it is hardly ever in sight, is very often within ear-shot—or at least you imagine it to be. It is full of odd little places, which seem to have been left high and dry, like Ivychurch and St. Mary-in-the-Marsh, Brenzett and Lydd. In reality they are quite close to each other, but as they are all reached by a maze of roads along which you are constantly turning round the sharpest corners, you get the impression of size out of all proportion to reality.

The best way to make one's first visit to Romney Marsh is to drive along its edge eastward from Tenterden. The road from that charming little town through Brook Street, Warehorne, and Bilsington, is one of the most beautiful in the whole of Kent. The contour markings show that it is as nearly as possible at sea-level, but in point of fact from it you will get alluring glimpses of the Marsh on your right as wide as if you were several hundred feet above the sea. On your left, the woods south of Ashford stand as a sort of rampart between the noisy outside world and the last place in which the Little People were seen.

Just after Bonnington, and about three miles from Lympne, you take the road to the right past Sherlock's Bridges, down to the outskirts of Dymchurch, and then turn south-west with Old Romney as your next objective. Hereabouts there seem to be an uncanny number of roads, and it is easy to miss the one that takes you to St. Mary-in-the-Marsh. On the other hand, if you do miss it, you pass a place-name as good as any in Kent. It is called Old Honeychild, which is a notable addition to your collection of

English names. At the cross-roads, two miles farther on, your way to New Romney lies to the left, but unless you wish to go into the town, you should turn again to the right just before you get there, and follow the road to Lydd. From here a typical marsh road, narrow and very winding, takes you to Walland Marsh to the right from Brookland to Rye. It is along the last two or three miles of this stretch that you will get that particular view of Rye which shows



the old and by far the most attractive side of it in characteristic surroundings. The alternative way is to carry on from Old Romney to Brenzett and Appledore, and in many ways I prefer it. It certainly has a more deserted appearance and runs through the most private part of the Marsh. From Appledore a very pretty short run takes you back to Tenterden.

There are any number of ways of reaching Romney Marsh from the west, but for myself I always prefer to make a rather long job of it, and go down from the hills just south of Maidstone. You will make first for Wrotham, and follow the Maidstone road as far as Wrotham Heath.

Here turn off to the right and cross delightful wooded heights, from which you get magnificent views, Tonbridge away on the right and the North Downs on your left. This brings you down to Mereworth, where at the cross-roads you bear to the left through Water Ebury to Teston. Here you turn sharp to the right over an ancient bridge which carries over the Medway, and make your way, probably with considerable difficulty, across Cocks Heath to Sutton Valence, Headcorn, and Biddenden and Tenterden.

.

It was the chance remark of a stranger that set me off on an out-of-the-way tour of a sort it had never occurred to me existed. I went to look for English castles, beginning with Kent. He was complaining that we had no castles to compare with those of the Rhine or Loire, and that anyway they were always at inconvenient distances from wherever he happened to be and generally difficult of access. I did not think he was right, but at the same time I could not remember ever hearing anybody speaking of a series of British castles as people speak of those across the Channel. The name of this ancient stronghold or that crops up in open road talk, but I have not yet heard any one say he has 'done' them as some people 'do' the cathedrals or the lakes.

With his judgment that no English castle—he was careful to say English instead of British—can be compared with the French or the German there is no point in quarrelling, provided allowance is made for the fact that most English castles seem to have been built to serve as salient points in particularly destructive battles rather than as modestly fortified country houses; and for fair wear and tear. The word 'castle' is applied alike to places equipped with moats and battlements, keeps, and glacis of the most warlike kind, and to mansions that are really not much more formidable of entry than an inn; but most of our famous places, of both

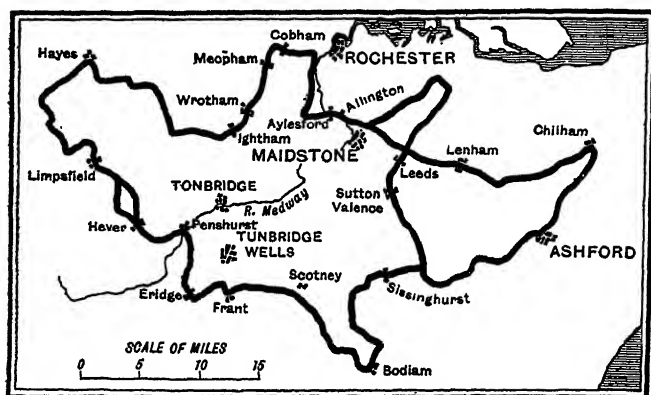
sorts, have suffered rude usage from one cause or another. There is not very much left of our baronial manors or strongholds, from Kenilworth to Bodiam, but in their day they may well have cut as fine a figure as Langeais or Loches. The more civilian of the Loire castles, at least, must have passed a more peaceful existence than our own.

The castles in and near Kent (you cannot be too precise about county boundaries in these matters) are not far away from London, nor are they difficult to find. They have no sites like those in Germany, France, or Austria, dizzily perched on some rocky spire or dominating a whole river's width; but none the less most of them are very picturesquely disposed, whether they guard a city or lie couched amid placid meadows and on the banks of forgotten streams; and many of them are, like so much of ancient England, off the highway. Little remains, it is true, in many cases, but where they still stand, and often where they are no more than ruins, they are very satisfying to the imagination. Leeds, for example, when you catch sight of it suddenly with the winter sunset warming its aged stones and tinging the water in which it stands on its islands; Hever, by the little Eden, one of the finest we have; Allington, beautiful for its thousand years; Leybourne, Tonbridge, Rochester—find these and, on the way, the relics of half a dozen more, and you will not complain that the castles of Kent are dull.

Here is one of several ways for the Londoner to the castles of Kent. Find your way to Hayes Common, beyond Beckenham, and thence to Sanderstead, Warlingham, and Limpsfield, being careful to branch off to the right after Warlingham for Woldingham and that stretch of the Pilgrim's Way that runs to the crest of Titsey Hill. It is always well to begin the day with a beautiful view, and here is one of the finest in all the south. You come down Titsey to Limpsfield and make your way to Hever, either by Edenbridge or, more privately, by Harbrough. Next

you find Penshurst, not a castle, but a beautiful house, Langton Green, Eridge Castle, and the road, through Frant, past Scotney Castle (Lamberhurst), and Bodiam, where you turn north again.

A first-class map must be carried, showing clearly every little road that can be followed, not only because one or two of the castles lie between lanes, but because they take you through the intimate scenery of England. The accompanying sketch-map gives an outline only of the general



route to be followed; but, as is evident, you must turn off many times and return if you are to see everything.

From Bodiam, where your time-table will certainly be badly thrown out if you are wise, turn up to Sandhurst and then take the road to Cranbrook and Maidstone, turning to the right at the cross-roads a mile out of Cranbrook, for Ashford. This leads you past Sissinghurst Castle, and you have a choice to make. At Biddenden, two miles on, the left-hand road takes you to Sutton Valence and Leeds; if you go on eastward through Ashford you come to Chilham Castle, on the Charing road. I preferred the former, but whichever you choose you come to the point on the Maid-

stone road, just opposite Leeds, where you climb over the North Downs to Tunstall and come down again to Maidstone past Guildsted Castle.

You need not go through Maidstone to see Allington and Leybourne if you take the by-way on the right a mile from the town. This takes you to Aylesford and Leybourne where, if you have time, you should turn off down the valley of the Medway for Rochester Castle. You can get back south to Wrotham through Cobham, which has, I understand, the original Leather Bottel Inn, and is, in general, the spiritual home of admirers of Charles Dickens. This way takes you through Meopham and over the high ground above Wrotham, from which you get so glorious a view. The day's run ends through Ightham, up the long hill from Riverhead and across the common to Hayes.

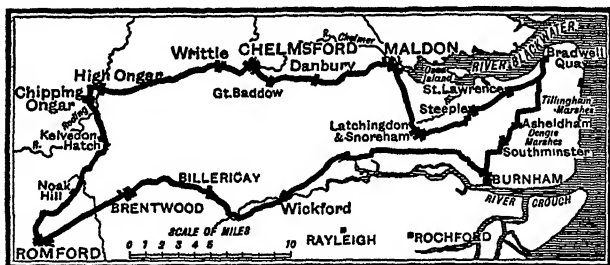
.

'The Essex flats'—a misnomer, beyond dispute. Take the map of the east coast, between the Wash and the Thames estuary, and you will look in vain for the indications of hills in that exciting part of Essex which lies between the Blackwater and Crouch rivers. If that map is a good one, you will see, here and there, very faint signs of the green, which means nearly sea-level, paling vaguely into an indeterminate faint yellow or dirty white, which means 'above three hundred feet', but, compared with almost any part of the kingdom, except the Lincoln Fens, the Essex Flats, in the eyes of the cartographer, are as flat as the sea.

They are very far from that, at all events from your point of view as an observant motor-cruiser. The height of this or that part of southern Essex above sea-level may be insignificant to the point of absurdity, but in more places than one the effect of that humble eminence is, for the time being, almost the equal of such royalties in the company of hills as the Dartmoor tors or the very Cumberland fells

themselves. In this they resemble that odd bit of England called Thanet, where everything is so flat and so near sea-level that a hump as small as St. John's Wood takes on the character of a mountain.

But it is not for that reason alone that you will find the Blackwater-Crouch country exciting. Hill-top views where there are no hill-tops are a good enough objective, in all conscience, for the driver who is prisoned in the gassy uproar of London streets on five or six days out of seven. When you can find prospects that seem as wide as any in Herefordshire, and that only at the trouble of a forty-mile run out of



town, and, moreover, from roads wholly innocent of charabancs (very lanes just now marked out by flaring gorse), you must be greedy to expect anything more. You get a great deal more, if you have the eyes to perceive it.

You get, between Romford and Chelmsford, if you go the right way, some of the best wooded country to be found within a day's drive of Charing Cross. It is in magnificent shape just now, at the very height of its fresh summer beauty. You look on typical English country-side, on rich pasture, field, and spinney, with here and there a meek brook for thirsty beasts, and as you look you are ready to take your oath the whole thing is at the least a hundred miles away—anywhere but where it is.

Whittle, a hamlet on the outskirts of Chelmsford, is the

model of all English village greens, and there are nothing like so many of these as the people who draw picture post-cards for us would have us believe. It has timbered houses, an ancient church, a delightful pond, much approved by suitable ducks, and its green, the reason for its existence, is incomparable.

On Sundays the easiest and quickest way to win through to the fields beyond the Mile End Road is, I have always found, the shortest. Take the way boldly by the Bank and that wonderful highway where every one seems to sell clothing, by Ilford and Romford. Trams and buses are thick upon the way, but they do not worry you, and you can get through far more comfortably than by the Regent's Park-Camden Town route.

After the rich woods by Chipping Ongar and the friendliness of Writtle—you recognize it at once as your personal property—take the road to Maldon by Danbury, a winding road of just the right sort to introduce you to the marshland lying between the two rivers. After Maldon, the signposts will incessantly invite you to Burnham, and you should obey them as far as Latchingdon and Snoreham (you will never believe in this name until you get there, but it is true, all the same), and there turn off to the left along a road which looks very discouraging on the map. It is all violent angles, like most roads precariously sketched across marshes the world over, but it is quite reasonable. If it were not, you would forgive its maddest wriggings for the sake of its end, at Bradwell Quay.

This sounds like the works of man, bandstands and ginger-beer stalls. Be comforted. There is no quay you would notice. There is an expanse of shingle, room in which to turn your car safely, and one of the quietest stretches of water in all England. East and west the Black-water ripples sleepily under the sun, little yachts and an occasional tramp dozing at anchor. The farther shore drops

greenly down to the water's edge, and Osea Island looks as if it were the undiscovered home of pirates. Nothing seems to happen, and nobody seems to worry about it. It is one of the most gloriously peaceful places you are likely to find on any Sunday's journey anywhere.

Through the Tillingham and Dengie marshes, by Asheldham and Southminster, your road home crawls blindly, but, if you take it rightly, safely. You can go down to see the other little yachts at Burnham-on-Crouch, if you like (and all little yachts which really go to sea are worth saluting), but the pirates' pinnaces off Bradwell should satisfy you, and your best way to go is by Button Hill and so to Wickford and Billericay. That unexpected water-front off Pewitt Island (an absurd spot of dry land) fills in the picture neatly enough. Everybody has heard of Burnham-on-Crouch, but not quite so many of Bradwell, perhaps.

.

At a first glance the neighbourhood of the Medway River does not seem to promise very much likely to attract even the London motorist, patient as he may be of bricks and mortar, easy to satisfy if only he can escape for a few hours into cleaner air and see growing things under a natural sky. For the whole of its more important length, where it is reasonably broad—a matter of half a dozen miles up from Rochester, and about the same to its mouth—it is spoilt by the works of man, and the road up the west bank, which looks so promising on the map, turns out to be a disappointment. True, the river displays itself, from the highest ground near Halling, to the best advantage it can, and before the factories came it must have been very picturesque, but its day is over.

The country it flows through south and west of Maidstone, however, is delightful, and for a single day's lazy drive, with many stops, it makes an excellent objective.

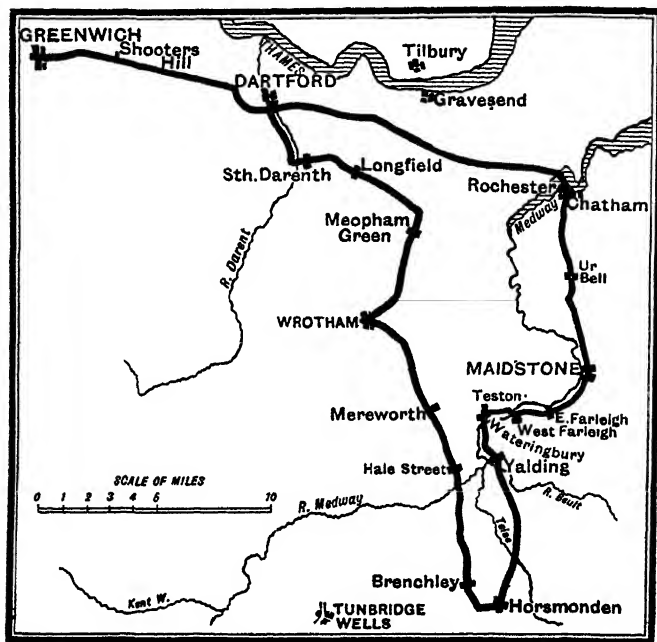
For one thing, it is at the beginning of one of those many strange parts of England which have been left in peace for no very obvious reason. In the attenuated diamond formed by the points, Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Ashford, and Tunbridge Wells, there is peace and quiet, such as you may search for jealously in counties five times as far from London Bridge, and fail to find. One railway line bisects it in a mercifully straight line from Tonbridge to Ashford, and there are two innocent branch lines running south from it. The rest is unspoilt, even by a single crowded main road.

It is a country of intimate charm, a country to make friends with gradually. It has no show-places, nothing, let due thanks be given, to bring view-seeking crowds (though on its edges there are fine prospects); yet once you have brought your car along those unpretentious roads which meander idly between Wrotham and Headcorn, Leeds and Brenchley, you will be grateful for the discovery of yet one more refuge. That it should lie in one of the most advertised counties and one which touches London itself is simply another instance of the mystery of England. You can wait an hour by the roadside for the sound of another car, and hear nothing but the drone of bees or the lap of a lazy brook. Very seldom do you hear a train.

The Medway country is perhaps the best of it, but to get there and back you pass much else that is beautiful, and in a drive of less than a hundred miles you find delight enough to satisfy the greediest. Here is the most convenient way I know of exploring it from London. Find the new Rochester road, beyond Blackheath and Shooter's Hill, one of the best, safest, and most practical of all the new arterials, and follow it straight through to Rochester itself. The town, despite its affinity to Chatham, is perfectly inoffensive from a driving point of view, and there is nothing to be gained by looking for ways of avoiding it. Cross the river and bear to the right on the Maidstone road. This carries

you up a fine hill, locally known as the Bell, from the top of which you have a magnificent view westward over the Medway valley.

In Maidstone look for the inconspicuous road which leads out to East and West Farleigh, and after the latter turn

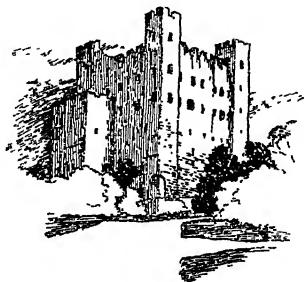


sharp to the right to Teston. Here you cross a fine old bridge and come to one of the many places where you will stop and drink deep of real peace. The railway, it is true, crosses the road a little farther on, but it has always seemed as idle as the road. In any case, trains are less disturbers of solitude than other people's cars, whether for four or forty passengers.

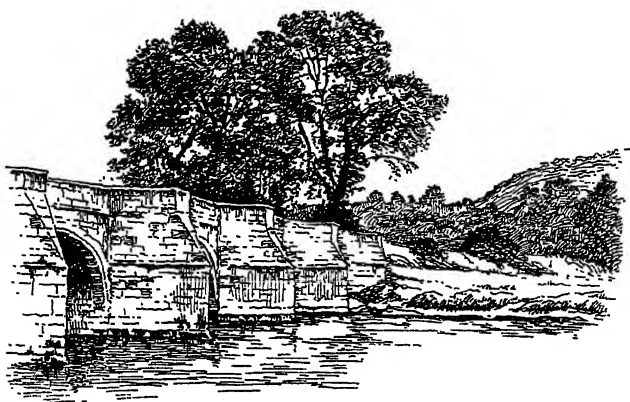
The Medway is still quite a sizable river here, but in a

few miles it dwindles until near Tonbridge it is not much more than a brook. Turn back again, for the moment, and find your way to Yalding, and through the meadows by the Teise to Horsmonden, where you turn to the right for Brenchley. It is all very peaceful, very unhurried, and the road north again to Hale Street and Mereworth is the same. You climb gently and steadily all the way from the Mereworth cross-roads, through a pleasant young wood, and although the height is nothing much over four hundred feet, the views behind your shoulder are magnificent. Still you have the world to yourself.

At Wrotham Heath turn west for Wrotham, and after the church, turn to the right up the long hill which leads you on to the sudden high ground above the Medway valley. You must stop and open up the view for yourself among the shrubs and saplings on the right, as they are dense enough and high enough to screen it from the road. Just after Meopham, bear to the left and find your way back to the Rochester road, near Dartford, by way of Longfield and South Darenth. You will be delighted at the emptiness and the freshness of the country. Dartford, Gravesend, and Rochester are all within hail, yet you will find it quite easy to lose your way among the little roads.



PART VI
WEST



CHAPTER XIII

THE SEVERN RIVER—FROM BOTH SIDES—THE TAIL OF THE COTSWOLD

THOSE who know Africa, Asia, and the Americas so that they can speak of their charms with the confidence which is born of intimate acquaintance, have a way of saying that we unfortunates in Great Britain have no rivers. They say, do those geographical experts, that we have a quantity of pleasant brooks, even, in some places, streams, but that, unless we count the estuary of the Thames at its widest point, where it is mostly pure North Sea, there is nothing between Cape Wrath and the Isle of Wight any one would dare to call a river. Upon which they will begin to describe the Hudson, the Nile and, quite possibly, the Mekong, all three being rivers which flow past mere capitals, as do the Thames and the Seine. They are urban to a degree.

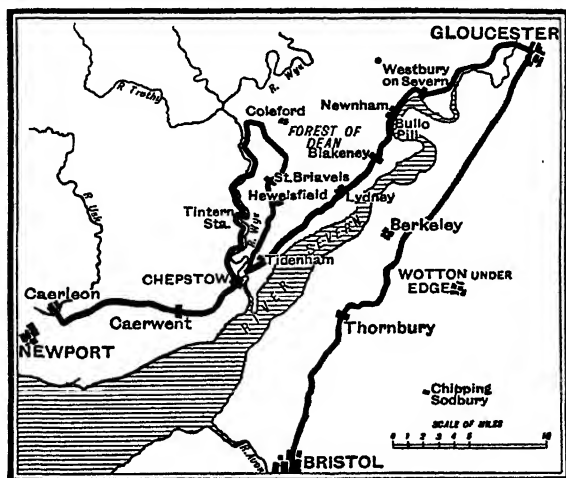
It is true that we have not many rivers of the larger kind, but even those of us who have seen the Hudson, the Nile, the Mekong, and even the Yangtse-Kiang, will concede that the rivers we have are streams of dignity, waters with a name to defend. The Thames may perhaps be little more,

above Staines Bridge, than a suitable place for regattas and houseboats and wet summer holidays; the Humber and the Mersey simply waterways of singularly ugly commerce; the rivers of Scotland and Devon not so much rivers, in the serious sense, as entrancing places where we sometimes get happy fishing, but we have at least one river which successfully claims rank with all your Niles and Hudsons and Far Eastern potentates. The Severn, at least in places, is as royal a stream as that which knew Cleopatra's rowdy water-parties.

It is the best sort of river, from one angle at least, that of the motor-cruises. From the point, somewhere between Cardiff and Bridgwater, when it ceases to be the Bristol Channel and becomes itself, it is a joy to explore by road. From the north side you have views over the Mendips and the Cotswolds, with hints of the Wiltshire downs, which are only equalled, from the south side, by those you get of the Forest of Dean and, at lucky moments, of the Welsh hills. At all tides it is beautiful water and, except at one or two points between Chepstow and Westbury-on-Severn, you are high enough above it to appreciate its smiling face. Only little rivers are at their best in a close-up view; the features of big ones are blurred unless there is plenty of perspective.

Let the Usk introduce you to the Severn, and begin your drive at Caerleon. If you are from the north and have no reason to go through Newport, be careful to take the right short cut from the Usk road on to the Chepstow road. There is another, very easy to take by mistake, and it leads you up a remarkably steep hill. After crossing the bridge at Caerleon keep to the right. The hill is not only steep but its road is narrow and there is no purpose to be gained by following it. Once on the main road it is all clear sailing to Gloucester, unless you are likely to be lured aside by the Romans at Venta Silurum (Caerwent) or, even more

probably and perhaps with better profit, by the exquisite valley of the Wye at Chepstow. It is certain, as a matter of fact, that you will go up it as far as Tintern Abbey, and once there, forgetting you are claimed by the Severn, go on to Monmouth, and come back to the big river by Coleford and St. Briavels and Hewelsfield. This last stage belongs, in reality, to another cruise altogether, but what does that matter?



Not far from this delightful river-road to Westbury is a house standing in an enviable position. Imagine it to be octagonal, for the sake of argument, and you find that from six out of its eight sides the view is over distant water to far-away hills. It is positively confusing, unless you have the map to check it by, as to all intents and purposes it seems to stand on an island, and the nearest thing of the kind must be Lundy, at the edge of the Atlantic. It is due to the well-planned co-operation of the Severn and the Wye, and it is certainly one of the most beautiful sites in England.

The charm of the river-road through Tidenham,

Alvington, Lydney, and Blakeney will effectively keep your progress down to the pace of a stroll. It is a perpetual joy, and half your pleasure will come of your astonishment and relief that it seems to be no better known. I drove up it on a fine Sunday, and during the two hours I spent in getting to Gloucester I saw only three cars in motion.

To the very end, where it narrows, after much meandering, to the modest girth with which you know it in the green valley south of Tewkesbury, the Severn keeps its air of a big river. Look out for it, specially by Blakeney and Newnham, where the surveyors have given it such pleasant names as The Noose, Bullo Pill, Pimlico Sand, and Unla Water. Look out for it and over it, across the levels on the other side, to the Cotswold, standing boldly up against the sky. It is a view you are not likely to forget. You see the Severn dwindle to a stream by Gloucester, and then, only a few miles south, on your way to Bristol (for, of course, your Severn cruise must take in one of the most romantic cities in England), you see it broaden out again and make once more that fine foreground to the picture of the hills of Monmouthshire.

.

England and Wales very amicably divide the peculiar loveliness of the Usk, the Wye, and the Severn. Some of the most richly picturesque country on either side of the marches—if that is the proper term for the Welsh border—is to be found where the three begin to open out for their last stage to the sea, and if England can fairly lay claim to the bigger share, with the best part of the Severn in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, and most of the Wye in Herefordshire, Wales does very well with the Usk and her share of the Wye in Monmouthshire. Indeed, when the oldest and most acrimonious of discussions arises (among the English only, never in the presence of foreigners), which

is the loveliest county, there are seldom lacking lovers of Devon and Sussex, Westmorland and the North Riding, to admit that Monmouthshire, east of the Usk, is not to be despised—the facts of the case being, of course, that, for its size, it holds nearly as much unexpected beauty as Surrey.

The country-side between Hereford and Usk, Talgarth and Gloucester, is of that happy sort you can christen all-season. Spring, where the three rivers flow, is perhaps more of a miracle than elsewhere; summer is a glory; autumn gives you a variety of glowing colours unsurpassed anywhere; and I know of no part of the kingdom where the footprints of winter, whether of wind or frost, show more bravely on a grey day. There is colour on these hills and along these river banks which not even a month of east wind nor the well-broadcast temperatures of Ross-on-Wye can avail to dull.

In summer, when the rather stale light and look of August is giving place to the radiance of September, there are few more rewarding drives than through those three border counties. The three rivers, or as much of them as you can comfortably follow on a week-end cruise, are perhaps at their very best, and though you must lay a course almost as crazily crooked as for the Severn country on the other side of the water, you will never complain because you must double back almost on your tracks. The Monmouthshire hills, which are the heart of the matter, have a thousand faces, and there is not one you can afford to run the risk of missing.

Begin at Hereford and take the leisurely road towards Gloucester by way of Mordiford. Here you will discover what you knew before, but hoped was not true, that the Wye, as far as Ross, behaves outrageously, twisting and turning with such cunning that to keep it in sight you must almost follow it on foot. It is the shyest of rivers, and your best plan is to turn your back on it and go view-hunting till you

meet it in more accommodating mood nearer the sea. Cross Haugh Wood to Marcle Hill (it is in two parts) and work your way round to Much Marcle, turning sharp right along an angular and lovely road to within about five miles of Ross. At the cross-roads turn to the left and come down to the Severn at Newnham, by way of Mitcheldean and Flaxley. From Marcle and afterwards you get great outlooks, though the works of man in the Forest of Dean are never far away.

From Newnham to Chepstow the road keeps you in close company with the Severn, and if you have luck in the day you will make a very slow journey of it, for the sake of the views across the water of the Gloucestershire hills. By Blakeney, Lydney, Alvington, and Tidenham you will dawdle long, if only to make sure of such place-names as Plusterwine and Etloe Duchy, and Stroat. How many languages really make English? You pass the ends of two roads you are to follow later, and at Chepstow must decide between the level road to Usk by Caerwent and Caerleon and the road over the hills. If you are conscientiously following the three rivers you had better take the first, and at Caerleon turn off to the right and follow the valley of the Usk by Llangibby to the town of Usk. If not, then take the hill road over the open spaces by Llangwm.

The hill road cuts into the road to Monmouth about two miles from Usk, and an easy run of seven miles brings you to Monmouth, where you turn sharp right over the Wye, and follow the wonderful valley past Tintern to Chepstow. On your left rise the hills through which your homeward run lies, and on your right Beacon Hill, at the foot of which, according to the map, is to be found the Virtuous Well. I cannot say what it will do for you, nor whether you will find the five-mile detour worth your while. It is well to remember that you are now in Wales, a country full of strange matters.

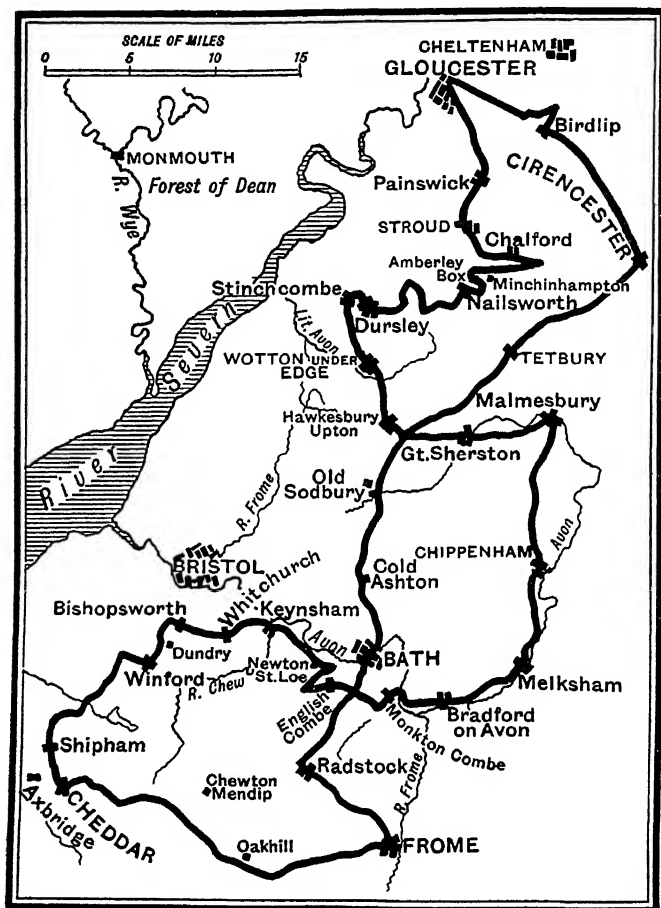
You come back to Monmouth by St. Briavels and Staunton and the great hill-side down into the ancient city, and then take the straight road up to Hereford by St. Weonards and Aconbury Hill. You have not perhaps seen very much of the Usk, the Wye, or the Severn, but you have seen wonderful country which you are certain to go back to many times.

Strictly speaking, it has less right to call itself Severn country than the Welsh side, between the Usk and the city of Gloucester. It is, geographically, the last of the Cotswold and the edges of the Mendip Hills, but as you are constantly reminded of the nearness of the big river, either by a sight of it from some hill-top, or because you are often by the side of the Avon, which runs into it only a few miles away, you come to regard it as belonging as much to the Severn as to the Avon. Whatever the rights of the case, you will agree that there are few better places in which to spend a peaceful week-end on the road. Two large cities, Bristol and Bath, lie in the middle of it, but even in holiday time you will be unlucky if you find the by-ways uncomfortably crowded. The inhabitants of those cities seem to go much farther afield when playtime comes.

The route I traced out last year between Gloucester and Wells and back by Malmesbury, was very soon abandoned as being too wasteful, and before I had driven a dozen miles I found myself embarked on a zigzag course, compared with which a figure-of-eight is plain sailing. With this Severn plan in my head I had meant to keep as close to the eastern bank as might be, but the first new view of the hills on the left of that rather tame road south scattered everything. As you will see, we turned up the hill near Hardwick and came out into the open air near Painswick.

There are, apparently, too many towns and villages in this enchanted corner of England, but when you come to drive among them you find that the plain ones do not matter,

and that the pleasant ones are exactly in the right place. Those hilly roads between Painswick and Stroud, Minchin-



hampton Common and Dursley, run often between houses, but only occasionally do you notice them except to like them. A Gloucestershire village, with its greystone, its

square windows, and its immense dignity, can never be anything but a friend.

On leaving Stroud, prepare to lose your way and your time and to gain everything else. Take the road first to Chalford and Cirencester, but a mile beyond Chalford station turn sharp to the right and drive back across Minchinhampton Common till you reach the golf-links. Here drop down through Amberley to Nailsworth and then climb up the long hill which brings you out on to the high ground above Wotton-under-Edge. Bear to the right at the fourth fork and take the road to Dursley, reaching Wotton by the road at the hill's foot. A crazy proceeding this looks on the map, but it is more than worth while.

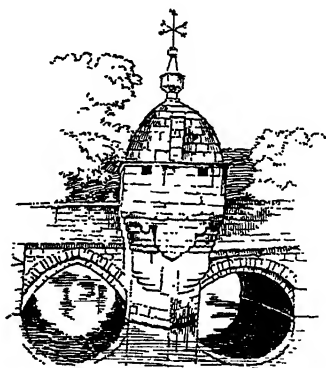
Come south now to Hawkesbury and then go across country to Malmesbury and south again to Chippenham and Melksham, a run through some of the pleasantest low country in the west, unambitious if you like, but full of abiding peace. At Melksham you meet the Avon and again at Bradford-on-Avon, decidedly one of the most picturesque towns in the kingdom, with its stone houses piled on high above the river and its steep little streets. From now onwards until you win clear of it at Whitchurch you will wander, completely lost, in a miniature hill-country which is as beautiful to look at as it is difficult to navigate. The best I can do is to give you the chief points to touch—Limpley Stoke; an acute-angled bend to the left after the railway bridge; Monkton Combe; Combe Down; English Combe; Newton St. Loe, and Keynsham, on the high road.

The lanes are narrow and steep and the signposts vague to a degree, but by the time you have found Whitchurch and Bishopsworth and climbed up to the top of Dundry Hill, you will forget your struggles in sheer gratitude. It has been real exploring.

A mile from the crest of Dundry bear to the right and at the cross-roads to the right again, for Winford and the main

road from Bristol to Axbridge. Although it is a main road it is a very agreeable one, and you may, after your adventures in the Somerset highlands, be pleased with its width and straightness, for a time. Before you can get tired of it, turn off it to Shipham and meet the Mendips. A delightful hill-road carries you to Cheddar and the way up through the gorge to the open spaces above. There will be sight-seeing crowds in Cheddar and many charabancs, but it is a small place and a few minutes will find you clear of it all and at the beginning of a run of some fifteen miles of hill-top.

At the end of it lies Frome, and here you turn to the left and go home to Gloucester by Radstock, Bath, up the hill past Cold Ashton (there is a place-name here, Pennsylvania, awaiting entry in your note-book), Old Sodbury, Tetbury, Cirencester, and the last exhilarating run along the Ermine Street and down Birdlip Hill.





CHAPTER XIV

IN CORNWALL—SPRING THERE—SALISBURY PLAIN—
THE ERMINE STREET

THERE is really no doubt that if Cornwall is a county (or duchy) of England, it is very unlike any of its fellows. As a foreigner in the sense in which the word is understood west of Exeter, that is to say a non-Cornish person, I have always entered it, whether by road or rail, with the conviction that it is a strayed piece of Brittany—though, so far as scenery goes, there is scarcely enough resemblance between them to swear by. Brittany I suggest, but perhaps only because there is a Celtic affinity between them as well as a St. Michael's Mount in each, but certainly some land which is foreign in the sense accepted nearer the Thames than Exeter.

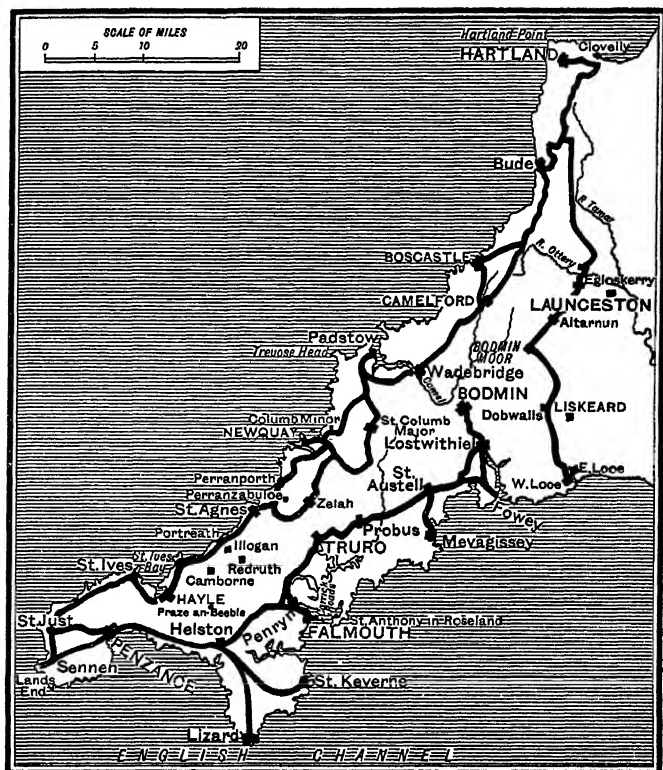
Whether this point of view agrees with your own or not, whether you feel on crossing the boundary that you are merely passing from one English county to another or leaving your own country (Devon is pure English, if there is such a thing) for a strange land, is no great matter. In whatever mood you cross over into Cornwall, you will find peace, content, even in the winds that sweep so contemptuously across it from sea to sea. The whole of that

curious peninsula has great attractions. In spring you go down there in order to keep as warm as possible, and it is very likely you will enjoy a good deal of success in the business, though there may be more surprises in store for you than there might be elsewhere along the south coast. It can be very cold as well as unbelievably warm, and while the west wind is not always the herald of mild weather, I have sometimes found that the east wind blows less virulently amongst the coves than anywhere else. In winter the farther end of Cornwall has most of the less agreeable climatic qualities of islands, and the fact that you can never be more than a few miles from the Atlantic Ocean is better appreciated in spring and summer than in the season of the long winter gales, or when the coast is wrapped in sea-fog.

From March onwards the country right down to Land's End makes very generous amends for its winter dourness. It is in mid-spring that you discover very pleasantly how deceptive the bleak appearance of Cornwall really is. The bare hill-sides, deeply scored by the footprints of the great winds, begin to glow with the extravagance of spring flowers and shrubs, and in all the little coves between Bude and the Looes early summer seems to be taking complete possession down to the edge of that sea whose blue, at the right time of year, is so much better a colour than the much advertised blue of the Mediterranean. Another excellent reason for motoring in Cornwall now is that you will find the roads comparatively empty. In July and August this lovely land is best avoided if your own companionship is what you like on a motor tour, but in April and May, and later on in the middle of September, you have its charms almost to yourself.

You should find very pleasant spring days on both sides of Cornwall, though naturally you will feel more sheltered at Fowey, Falmouth, and in the curve of Mount's Bay than at Newquay, St. Ives, or Padstow, and for that reason

I would recommend you to start your search for a spot in the Cornish sun from the direction of Hartland Point. Ten miles from Hartland itself you go down to the sea-level to



Bude. The main road unfortunately runs a mile away from the sea, but there is a very secondary by-way, which will take you along the edge of Bude Bay on foot, and is well worth exploring. On the way to Boscastle you climb up again to over eight hundred feet above the sea, and until you have left Camelford behind you, run high up across the moors.

At Wadebridge you must branch off to the right if you want to inspect Padstow, which you should certainly do, as it lies on a particularly pleasant river. From here more little by-ways run out to Trevose Head towards the main road at St. Columb Minor, and it is well to allow plenty of time for the first part of your journey down to Land's End. It is hereabouts that you come, after Camelford, to the first batch of the odd place-names in which Cornwall excels over every other county. For example, there is Bedrugga, Arrallas, Rejerrah, and Tucoyse. What would you suppose were the origins of these names? They would look as natural on the map of a country a thousand miles away. Were they taken from some forgotten invader from a forgotten country, Atlantis for example? Praze-an-Beeble, Constantine, and Illogan seem to have little enough to do with the British Isles. Did you know there is a Brighton in Cornwall?

From Newquay southwards the road runs windingly to Perranporth and St. Agnes (where it describes a circle round St. Agnes Beacon), but it is better to stick to the by-ways until Hayle is reached, not only in order to avoid Redruth and Camborne, but in order to get an idea of the odd attraction of that austere coast. After Hayle you have the famous little road which runs from St. Ives round the promontory to Land's End, and whether the Atlantic winds are blowing or not, you will hardly fail to find places to like. Once you have left that wonderful point and approach Penzance, you should be in a milder climate, and within reach of a number of those retiring spots where it is hardly ever known to freeze. It is well worth turning off to the right at Helston to go down to the Lizard and to follow the winding roads round the coves between Rosemullion Head and Coverack. If you stick to the main roads in Cornwall you see very little of it.

You will probably find it very pleasantly warm Falmouth

way and all the country round Carrick Roads, and King Harry's Reach is as likely as not to be stealing spring days before its turn. If you have had enough exploring, take the direct road to St. Austell by Truro, and make your way to Fowey, one of the most attractive minor ports in all England. Like the two Looes, East and West, Fowey is pleasanter to visit in winter than in holiday time, and you will find that a very agreeable week-end can be spent in any of these three. Take your way homeward across Bodmin Moor, following for choice the road from West Looe through Dobwalls. It is a magnificent open space, not so impressive, perhaps, as its English fellows across the Devonshire border, but none the less a very restful spot in which to spend an hour or so. When you reach Altarnun the road goes windingly to Downhead, and then to Egloskerry, and you will have explored a lot of out-of-the-way corners before you rejoin the main road which takes you back to Hartland.

It was not of Chicago or its state-neighbours that I thought when I was asked to map out a three-days' tour in the Middle-West—the open country that lies between Portsmouth and Bristol, the Berkshire Downs and the Mendips. The familiar description 'Middle-West' brought me no suggestions of prairie or Michigan Ave., gangsters, hooch, the 'spot', the lights of St. Louis, mass-produced motor cars, or wheat. Rather I thought of Huck Finn and Jim, and wished that I could pick them up, with Tom Sawyer, in my car and be taught by all three how to explore England. When it came to history, Jim would undoubtedly be more interesting on the subject than Tom; but I would depend only on Huck for my happiness. A raft on the Mississippi cannot but make perfect travelling companions.

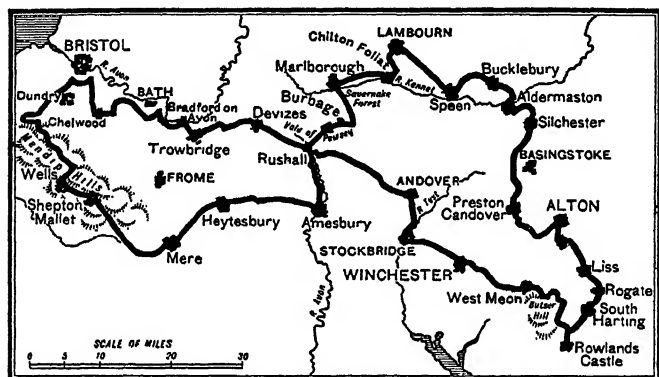
Look at a good large-scale map of that glorious country, and envy me the crazy figure-of-eight I traced. As usual, I thought I knew nearly all those odd roads pretty well,

but experience impresses upon me year after year the immense burden of my ignorance. It is a happy burden, you will admit, that compels me to go out into old England every fine day, and most foul ones, to lighten it. The things that grow, from the wild orchids to the elder, the hawthorn, and the king of them all, the chestnut, interfere with my prosaic survey. There was a new colour on the downs, too, both in Berkshire and at the end of Salisbury Plain, I have never seen before—and I have lived many years among them. It was blue, not so far short of the blue you see over the Pyrenees. That distracted my attention seriously, as did the young squirrels and the new entry of rabbits Urchfont way.

And wherever I went there were blazing the flowering trees and shrubs which are so infinitely more beautiful than anything you will find in Hawaii, Cairo, or Japan. Red may, laburnum, lilac, guelder rose, with, here and there in a warm nook, that strangely tropic thing, the magnolia. Add the chestnuts and the newly-dressed beeches, the apples—how in the world did I come to leave them so late, the loveliest of the lot?—and all the serene sequence of fruit-trees, and you must find something better than the gold mohur and the bohinia, better even than the plum-bago, if you are to make any sort of an effect against the English country-side in late May.

I went this way, led on from bend to bend, from valley to hill-top by what I saw before me and for no other reason whatever. From Rowland's Castle (which is two miles north of Havant) I went aside to the hill by South Harting, to Rogate and across that incomparable common to Liss. I followed then the winding lanes that take you to Selborne, across the Alton-Winchester road to Preston Candover and so over the scented downs to Worting. Scented is just what they were, redolent of the yellow stuff they call mustard; of the air in which the larks will presently sing.

Having a proper sort of map with you, abandon yourself in all hope and trust to the roads that lead you by Silchester and through the pines and gorse of the commons to Aldermaston, coming after a little while to Bucklebury Common. You will go very slowly here, but in time you reach Hermitage and so come down to the Bath road at Speen. The seasonable weather had just uncomfortably flooded the lovely road of the Lambourn valley, so I had to go a duller way. You are luckier now and may keep on by the banks of that



pleasant stream to Lambourn itself. Come south again, crossing the Ermine Street and meeting the Kennet at Chilton Foliat, one of the best villages in England. And after that you wander again through Ramsbury to Marlborough and through Savernake Forest, down to Burgh and through the Vale of Pewsey.

It is at Rushall that you turn off to the left and following the Avon to Amesbury make the figure-of-eight. The road from Amesbury to the Mendips is better, I think, by Mere than by Frome, but whatever happens you must go to Wells and take the road over the hill-tops to Langford, whence you look north over your way to Dundry Hill. You skirt Bristol, after Dundry, by Chelwood and the steep

and winding way into Bradford-on-Avon and so come back to Avonside through Devizes and Rushall. From here a straight and, I am sorry to say it, a main road takes you swiftly to Andover, where you turn south beside the Test to Stockbridge. The last stage takes you through Winchester and West Meon.

The total distance, including the run from Speen to Lambourn and down to Chilton Foliat, I make out to be just about three hundred miles. If you start from London you must add about a hundred and ten for the whole journey.

If you are that most fortunate sort of person, a lover of maps, and regard a good atlas as the finest picture-book in the world, you must have often been held up in your planning of a day's cruise by those ruler-straight lines cutting straight across country, sometimes marked as part of a modern road—modern, that is, compared with those which were built for the Eagles to expand Roman Britain—more often shown by dotted lines, and felt the faint stirrings of a wish you could follow them from end to end. They have splendid names, the Saxon or Norman even more romantic than the Roman, and they ran originally such bold courses, turning aside from their straight lines only for obvious reasons, making nothing of natural obstacles.

Roads of adventure of the highest order they must have been, as is proved by their unexpected disappearances and reappearances in totally different country perhaps a hundred miles away. Take the Icknield Way, for example. I stand open to correction from archaeologists and all who know better, and in remarking that it seems to start from St. David's, in South Wales, finish at Teignmouth in South Devon, and take in Baldock, Royston, and Newmarket, in Cambridgeshire, I may be leaving out all the best. At all events, the Way is to be traced near the last four places.

Watling Street is one of the most uncompromising, running

straight from Canterbury to Wellington in Shropshire, by way of Rochester, St. Albans, Dunstable, Stony Stratford, Towcester, Weedon, Atherston, and Chesterfield. The Fosse Way was more comprehensive, starting from Lincoln, and reaching Cornwall by way of Newark, Leicester, Moreton-in-the-Marsh, and Cirencester, but I was put to it to find a trace of it between Leicester and Moreton, Cirencester and Cornwall. What imperial ideas were these, compared with our own trifling Bath, Portsmouth, and Great North Roads!

The following of these highways can make a fascinating series of tours for the winter months. You will often be lost for hours, even for days, in the sense that you are off them, but with hardly an exception the parts that survive to be renewed for wheel traffic after the empire fell and the last Britannic emperor ruled us, held by the last fragile thread to Rome herself, run through fine country. Take the Ermine Street—it has the article, I believe—and see where it leads you. It began, like the Icknield Way, perhaps, even probably, as part of it, at St. David's, but appears as a recognizable road at Cirencester, and runs continuously thence to Newbury. An interval, so far at least as my own experience goes, and then it seems to meet the Icknield Way at Royston, where it becomes the Great North Road through Huntingdon and Stilton as far as Grantham. Here it turns off to connect with the Fosse Way at Lincoln, and apparently comes to an end at the mouth of the Humber, by Brigg and Winterton.

Here is a pleasant way of making a first acquaintance with the Ermine Street, which incidentally, is one of the finest straight roads we have, and of approaching it through the sort of open country which inspired the Roman road-builders. The run I traced ends at Newbury, where the Street vanishes, to reappear many miles to the north-east, but I left it for the end and kept to the south for Salisbury

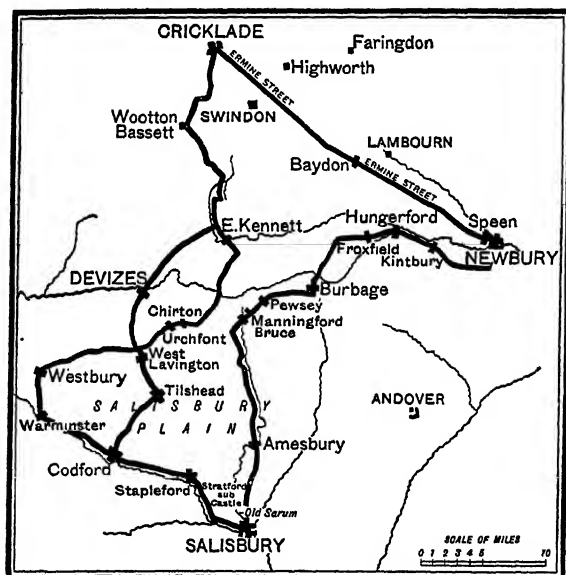
Plain. The Bath road as far as Hungerford is dull, and the by-ways south of it should be followed. It is a peaceful wandering way through Hampstead Marshall and Kintbury, and very little time is lost by avoiding the main road. For five miles after Hungerford you must keep to the Bath road, but you leave it two miles beyond Froxfield, to the left.

From here to Steep Green and that homeliest of villages, Burbage, you skirt Savernake Forest, and for the next eighteen miles you have peace and smiling country. Turn sharp to the right outside Burbage and follow the road to Pewsey by Easton Royal and so come down to the Avon near Manningford Bruce. A little farther on the road forks, both branches leading to Amesbury.

Hereabouts lie Old Sarum and Stratford-sub-Castle, a mile or so from the highway. All this run from Manningford Bruce to Salisbury is as pleasant as can be, and you will take it all very slowly. Take the Wilton road out of Salisbury, bear right across the railway on the Warminster road, and at Stapleford turn left along the edge of the Plain, and through the tiny valley of the Wylde. When you see the little rise on which Codford Castle stands, turn to the right again, through Codford St. Mary, and strike north over the Plain to Tilshead, or, if you prefer it, go round by Warminster and Westbury. They have proper-sounding place-names in these parts, like Chitterne All Saints, Break-heart Hill, and, two miles beyond Tilshead, St. John-a-Gores Cross.

Immediately after West Lavington you leave the Plain and, turning to the right, run through Urchfont and Chirton, where again you branch off north for the Ermine Street. It is fine open country all the way and there are odd names in plenty for your note-book. Adam's Grave, Milk Hill, and St. Ann's Hill come first, and beyond West Kennett, where the Ridgeway climbs up to the Downs, there is Grey Wethers, one at least which they cannot beat in America, the land of names.

By Wootton Bassett and Cricklade you come at last to the Ermine Street, and for twenty-eight miles to Speen you follow the footsteps of the centurions. It is a wonderful road, narrow but excellent, and it gives you the impression that it goes on for ever. It looks and feels as if nobody had used it since the last Roman left the country. Younger



roads cross it at intervals, and most of those crossings are blind and dangerous, but it is out of the question that you should be in a hurry when you are driving along a road which began in Wales and finishes in Lincolnshire. Between Cricklade, Baydon, and Newbury you will travel slowly, for you will get on your right a view of familiar country you never knew existed. You are running between the Bath road and that best of all downside roads which takes you from the Lambourn valley, past Ashdown Park to Faringdon, and, as it were, you get a look behind the scenes.



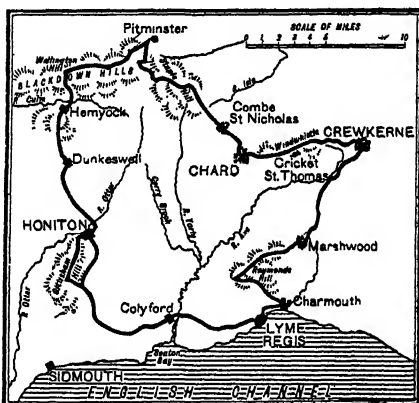
CHAPTER XV

IN SOMERSET—THE BLACK HILLS—IN HAMPSHIRE

It would be interesting to discover the origin of the word 'black' as applied to hills and mountains. Wherever you go, between Galway and Galicia, you come across a range of hills or a single mountain with that forbidding epithet. There is even an entire country, Montenegro, that suffers from it. I know of only one range, apart from the Rocky Mountains, that deserves it, and that not always. The hills about Snowdon have an austerity which in certain lights reminds you a little of the common expression 'black looks'. Those North Wales peaks can be very forbidding on a cloudy day, and yet not a square mile of them is called 'black'; one of the most smiling places in all Surrey is called Blackdown, the breezy hills below Brecon are among the several Black Mountains in the kingdom, and what I always consider the most friendly as well as the most private part of Somerset has also that diabolical tag tied to it.

There is nothing black or forbidding about the wooded hills between the Vale of Taunton and Honiton, Cullompton and Chard. They are dark only at night. So long as there is a gleam of daylight—and you will remember how mellow, how real, is the light of the west even in winter—those

pleasant heights are among the most radiant in the country. Certain of the Yorkshire and Westmorland moors have that same luminousness, that curious look of being flood-lit from within, which probably comes from the living colour of heather, but they have all the luck on their side in their surroundings. The northern moors are like huge rollers in mid-ocean, unshadowed, towering above the world, while the Blackdown of Somerset is only a little range of hills between the Dorset downs and the majesty of Dart-



moor. There is no particular reason why it should be one of the loveliest places in all England.

But that is what it is, past argument. The main road to Exeter and the Atlantic, or one of them, runs through their southern edge; if you go by Taunton to Exeter you see the northern section. Of all the thousands who drive down from Salisbury to the agreeable places in South Devonshire how many have ever taken the trouble to turn off at either Chard or Honiton and explore the little roads running up through the woods that half hide, half reveal, the sweep of those hills? The rest are missing one of the countless hidden beauties of England.

The Somerset Blackdown is small. I do not suppose that the international name applies strictly to much more than fifteen square miles or so, but there are plenty of by-ways, as well as at least a couple of highways, along which you may drive in much content for the best part of a day. Here is the detour I would advise you to follow on your way to Devon and Cornwall in search of the first footprints of spring. You will probably have marked Crewkerne on your itinerary, on the main road between Salisbury and Exeter. When you get there turn off to the left to either Bridport or Lyme Regis, according to the time you have to spare. The first way leads you through Beaminster and is the less interesting. It brings you to Charmouth, where the second road comes in.

This one is really by far the best. I do not say that the country between Crewkerne and Charmouth, by Marshwood and Raymonds Hill, is all of it a beauty spot, but it is a very attractive corner of that very lovely county of Dorset, and by the time you reach Charmouth, which is certainly one of the most alluring hamlets in Europe, you will be in the right mood for the rest of the day. You will have realized how extremely private an ordinary road can be in this part of the world, and how, a trespasser yourself, you can resent the use of it by anybody else without your permission. It is this quality that marks out an English road above all others. And Dorset is a very English part of England.

From Charmouth you go down to Lyme Regis, up over the big hill and down to Colyford in the valley of the Axe, another village in which you will decide to build a refuge from the ugliness of life. Five miles on you must bear to the right for Honiton, taking either the right or the left-hand fork three miles beyond the cross-roads. The right-hand one takes you over Farway Hill, the other over Gittisham. Both are a delight, but I think Gittisham the

better of the two. The views from the top are very delaying.

At Honiton you follow the London road for a mile, and then turn up into Blackdown (or its friends) along the Wellington road. This is one of the familiar Devonshire type, charming, but too high-hedged. You will often have to stop and look about you at gaps and gates. None the less, you will be very grateful for the possession of a car, and the joy of driving it, by the time you reach the real Blackdown ridge at the top of Wellington Hill. The next few miles are, in their way, unequalled, whether you bear to the right to Pitminster or keep straight on by Culm Head to Sidcombe. The views from that road, high-perched at the foot of a wood, railed in on the north by aisles of magnificent beeches, dropping sheer on the south to the clustered woods of the Otter valley, are exquisite.

The only reason why I suggest the Pitminster detour as an alternative is because that way you climb up Blagdon Hill, and that is a thing that must be done at least once a year. It is as invigorating as Sutton Bank or Llanberis Pass. The road follows the crest of Staple Hill towards Chard, and here, again, you will spend most of your time stopping. If you have a clear day—and you should, in March—you will see the golden glory of Dartmoor thirty miles away on your right, and marvel that you have never been here before. You come down to the levels by Combe St. Nicholas and Chard, and return to Crewkerne through Cricket St. Thomas and over Windwhistle Ridge. Even in ancient England can you find finer names than these?

.

Among the lucky English counties where summer seems to linger latest—or, if that seems an excessive statement, where winter seems to matter least—Somerset must count high. Yet I should not call it, in the ordinary way, a

county where you would look to find that gratifying and surprising warmth that occasionally catches us all unawares and, before we have time to gasp three times, has roasted and steamed us in the most approved tropical fashion—and gone. No doubt Somerset gets its share of proper summer weather when the thermometer goes up towards the nineties, but in a general way I should put it down as rather a chilly county. It has bleak hills all round it, those of Salisbury Plain, the last of the Cotswold, the Mendips in the middle, the Blackdown and the hills of Somerset on the south. In the middle of all this you find the wide valley of which Bridgwater is the chief town, level with the sea or nearly so, a good two-thirds of the whole county. It can be mistily hot here under the proper conditions, but it never seems to me hot-weather country.

To appreciate the general mild character of Somerset you must go down before the rigid frosts of January and February and the assassin winds of March have stupefied it. As you drive about those easy-going main roads and among those frankly somnolent lanes you will see that all the symptoms of harsh winter are lacking. If there are long gripping frosts as in other parts of South England, there is little to tell you of them in hedgerow, field, and spinney. The hill-tops look bleak when there is no sunshine, but no more so than hill-tops elsewhere. Somerset, in common with Devonshire, Yorkshire, and that Sussex which I fear has gone the way of all counties within comfortable reach of urban poetasters and suburban hikers, is cursed with an annual joke concocted from high ignorance by persons who have never been nearer to it than Woking. As Sussex is said to be silly and Yorkshire (to judge from the specimen dialect) even sillier, Somerset is said to be easy-going and merry, and that, as it happens, is exactly what it looks like when you drive down between the hills to its pleasant villages and ancient towns.

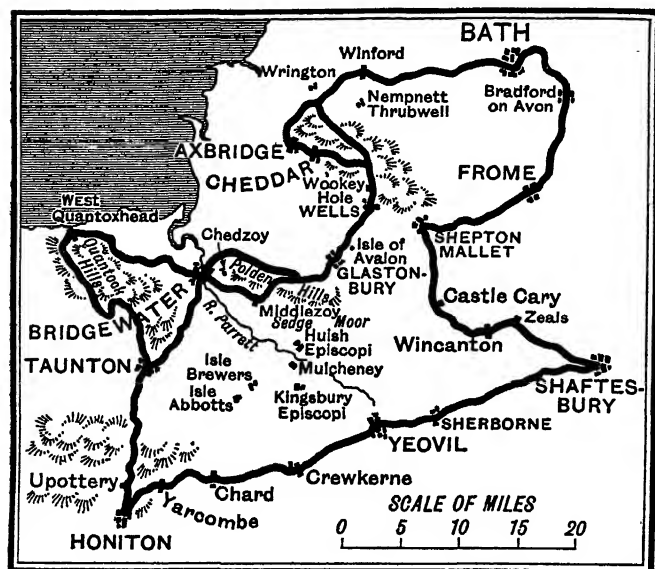
Here is a wandering way to some of the best parts of Somerset, a route that will very satisfyingly fill a winter's day if you do not delay your start too long. Taking Bath as your starting and returning point—incidentally, one of the best things to see in Somerset, whether it be the associations of Beau Nash or the extraordinary neatness of the architecture that attracts you—you follow the Bristol road for a couple of miles and then turn off westwards for Corston and the winding by-ways that take you to Barrow Hill. It is agreeable country, but you will perhaps be more drawn to the place-names, pure Somerset, than to anything else. You have such riches as Compton Dando, North Malreward, Chew Magna, and, well off the road to the south, Nempnett Thrubwell—the sort of name you might find in a novel of English life written by a Frenchman before the war.

At Winford you are at the foot of Dundry Hill, and if you have time you should certainly climb it for the sake of the view of the Mendips. There is a better road up there two miles farther on, by Butcombe Court, but it is better fun to take the first one and come down the second. Back again at sea-level you face the Mendips and have a choice of roads. You can either keep to the left after Wrington and drive along the ridge of the hills past Priddy and so down into Wells, or you can skirt the western flank by Axbridge and rejoin the other through the Cheddar Gorge. As it is winter-time I should certainly choose the latter. Without the ginger-beer stalls and other appurtenances of high holiday, you can, if you don't like the stuff, turn a blind eye on the printed appeals to buy the local cheese, and enjoy the very real grandeur of England's only canyon.

But, whichever you do, you must go to Wells, Canterbury's only rival. There is no town like Wells, and no cathedral.

Soon after comes the Vale of Avalon and Glastonbury,

somewhat smirched by red brick, but still holding its own, and at Ashcott another choice of ways. If you take the right-hand road you cross what is called Polden Hill, a faintly discernible hump that provided some sort of background for the battle of Sedgemoor; if you take the left-hand you go to a place incredibly named Middlezoy, close to the better-



known Westonzoyland. Both bring you to Bridgwater, and in between lie Chedzoy and Bawdrip. By Nether Stowey and West Quantoxhead and Bicknoller you skirt the Quantocks, narrowly missing Stogumber. They are inconvenient hills to cross with a car except at Lydeard St. Lawrence, where a by-way will take you by Cothelstone up to nearly a thousand feet and reward you with fine outlooks.

You drop down into the valley again at Taunton and immediately address yourself to the climbing of the splendid

hill to Blagdon, certainly one of the finest heights in the west and giving you quite certainly some of the finest views. Your road runs at well over eight hundred feet above the sea to Upottery and, after you have turned very sharply to the left just beyond it, as far as Yarcombe Hill. You come down once more into a little valley, cross the River Yarty and straddle the big hump that separates Yarcombe from Chard. Every mile of this is magnificent and you will see much you overlooked in summer-time.

The way home is easy and pleasant. You go through Yeovil and Sherborne and Shaftesbury, because it is the duty of all to go to Shaftesbury whenever they get the chance. Back westwards again through Zeals and Castle Cary, Shepton Mallet and Frome, ending up with that enchanting place Bradford-on-Avon.

.

Wandering idly towards the setting sun on an afternoon of March wind and cold blue sky, I came upon the beginnings of what I thought, in the end, was the ideal first spring tour of the year, the cruise on which you see for the first time the certain signs of the death of winter. There were open downs, gleaming under the sharp spring sunshine, much as they would glow later on under the real thing in June; there was a famous river, its tenants safe, in that piercing easterly breeze, from the sometimes fatal lure of hackled-dressed hook; a great wood, making and holding warmth, defying the wind with royal and ancient trees; a glimpse of the second greatest waterway we have; hills and a noble plain.

Except that there were no mountains and no high moors, the country I saw on that long day was all of the best kind for such a prospecting tour anywhere south of the Border. It was all unmistakably English. Nearly all England is beautiful, as no other country in the world is beautiful, but

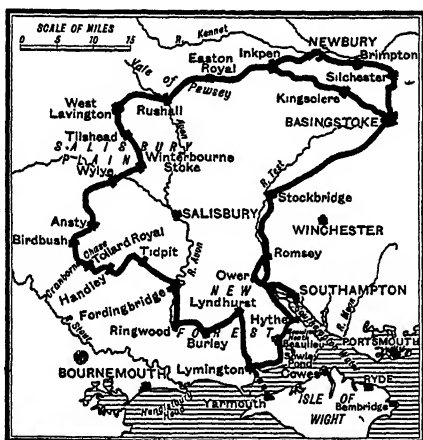
not all of it owes no debt to foreign lands. Kent, Norfolk, and East Yorkshire often remind one very clearly of things across the Channel and the North Sea—often, but not always, or half the mystery of it would be gone—but Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Berkshire are as purely English as the Lakes, Warwickshire, and the Cotswolds. Go west through Dorset and Devon, east through Sussex, and you have the same thing. A little farther either way, as far as the North Foreland or Land's End, and you come into invaded territory.

It was difficult, as it always is, to resist the temptation to go on nearer the declining sun. Once you set out upon that road towards the open Atlantic, even if your destination be no farther than Salisbury, it calls for iron determination not to let the car have her head and dismiss all thought of time and appointments. That day, early yet in March, it was neither of these that kept me east of Cranborne Chase, but a vivid memory of what can very suddenly happen to motorists on Dartmoor in the teeth of the Air Ministry's well-meaning prophecies. It was in the third week of an April that I was as securely snowbound on those glorious hills as you would wish to be on an Alpine pass in February. I turned back, and left that incomparable moor to a safer season.

I began my own particular Easter tour, for no reason but that of chance, at the plain town of Basingstoke. The west called me and I took that fine road that leads to Stockbridge, the best, I think, we have in the south, if emptiness, spacious outlook, and safety are your needs. It is not long, but every one of its twenty miles is a joy. Moreover, at the end of them is Stockbridge itself, decidedly one of the pleasantest country towns in the world, with its old bridge over the greatest trout stream and its wide rambling street. It is one of the little English towns that seem to keep themselves, if not 'to themselves', at least for the particular

comfort of England's many lovers—those English lovers who live in dread of what disfigurement may befall her in her greatest dignity, anywhere, between one week and the next.

You follow the road to Romsey, by King's Somborne, and thence to Totton, either through Ower or by the most direct road, and, after a short interval of tramlined roads and suburbs, on to the road that brings you to Hythe. And



it is useful to remember that a by-way on the Lyndhurst road, a mile from Totton, will save you the toll-bridge between Rumbidge and Eling, a medieval form of highway robbery. I wish Hythe were on a hill. It is a little town on Southampton Water, with a good deal of the attraction of Yarmouth, in the Isle of Wight, and (an almost daily excitement), it is passed, and no doubt completely overlooked, by great liners on their way to and from the ends of the earth. But it lies too low. Raised a mere three hundred feet above those haughty ships, the big and the little, it would be the most fascinating spot on the whole English coastline.

After Hythe you turn off over the heath to Beaulieu and its river and then go down to Buckler's Hard and St. Leonard's, the Bergerie (there must surely be an article before that strayed foreign name), Sowley Pond, and Lymington. If you have planned your Easter holiday on the right lines, you will have time to take the little steamer across to Yarmouth. If you are there only an hour, it is more than worth while. Yarmouth stands alone.

From Lymington you strike north through the New Forest as far as Lyndhurst, and then turn back through Knight Oak Wood to Burley Street. If you go by way of Wilverley Post you pass Vinney Ridge Heronry, a name to remember. At Ringwood you turn north again by the road along the Avon to Fordingbridge where, from a perfect distance, you see the last of the great wood. Westward, your road lies now to Cranborne Chase, by Tidpit and the main Salisbury road as far as Handley, where you find your way through the Chase to Tollard Royal and Bird-bush on the Shaftesbury road. Delightful by-ways will take you by Anstey Hollow to Tisbury and Wylde, and so on, to the broad spread of Salisbury Plain. Follow the way past Yarnbury Castle to the Devizes road and leave this latter at West Lavington for Urchfont and the Vale of Pewsey, Rushall, and Easton Royal. The last stage home can lie either through Hungerford and the certainty of the Bath road to Newbury, or, more adventurously, by Inkpen to Kingsclere; or, best of all, to Newbury and Brimpton, Aldermaston, and Silchester.



CHAPTER XVI

THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS—IN WILTSHIRE—IN SOMERSET—
IN SPRING AND AT OTHER TIMES

IT is little less than a miracle that within ninety miles of London you can still find car roads which, save for an occasional dressing of tar, together with a general improvement of surface, have not changed in any important respect for the past thirty years. They are roads which are not only innocent of petrol stations, except in the rare villages of any size, but of any form of modern building. On the outskirts of the very small towns you must go through you may find some admittedly hideous 'council' architecture, cottages, as they have the audacity to call them, whose counterparts are to be found in such foul profusion on the Great West Road and other places of the kind, but, as the ancient thatched ones infinitely outnumber them, they put up but a feeble offence.

You can drive for days about these little roads, every day seeing new things and old things in new lights; or you can, from Reading, Basingstoke, Bath, the Cotswold country, Oxford, and the Chilterns, see most of it once in a single

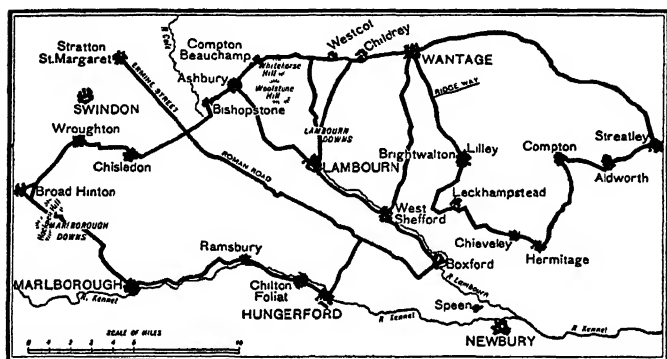
day. For the whole place is only thirty-five miles long by fifteen wide. It is the Down country that stretches the length of the northern half of Berkshire and a dozen miles into Wiltshire. The Bath road, which you need not touch, between Marlborough and Theale forms the southern boundary, while the Icknield Way—no less—in places known as or possibly confused with the Ridge Way, runs the whole length of the northern edge. This, however, is still more or less as its last repairers left it, presumably somewhere about the fourth century, and, although it is possible in a few places to drive along it for short distances, I do not advise the attempt on wet days. The wind-cropped grass, undisturbed for a thousand years, is its surface.

It will be obvious that you must—or rather that you will—take delight in the need to go over the same ground again and again. From the northern side there are numbers of little enticing roads tempting you straight up the grey-green sides of the downs, but by no means all of them survive.

Some come to a sudden end amid byres, or even, as on the White Horse Hill, nothing at all but down pasture, high up above the world, but here and there you are warned by new notices that they are unsuitable for cars. You must be ready to turn back, and for that reason it is well to find out first into what sort of a track a promising by-way degenerates beyond your line of sight. Further, your map must not only be on a large scale, but of the latest edition procurable. They have not yet spoilt the little roads of the downs, but there are signs that they have been discovered. Finger-posts point the way up hill-sides that a year or two ago were accepted as impassable by most people. For less obvious reasons, too, a map is essential, for some of the new signposts are highly misleading or, if you prefer it, superfluous.

The country of the old roads begins at Streatley on the Thames, and the best way, for a new-comer to its delights,

is to turn up the hill to the left, by the inn, to Aldworth and Compton. The road is fairly steep, and it takes you, as it were, in one stride on to the downs, where the light is like the light nowhere else in England and the face of the land is as it has been for a full generation. At Compton turn down to Little Hungerford and Hermitage in the woods—just missing Hampstead Norris—and then swing back towards the high ground by Chieveley and the exceedingly winding ways to the Ridge Way above Wantage,



through Leckhampstead. You leave Brightwalton on your left and take the road by Lilley over Lockinge Down.

Here you are well over seven hundred feet up, and you have the first of the great views spread out before you. On a clear day you look straight across the Thames Valley to the Cotswold about Chipping Norton, and you will make a long stay here. You come down a long and steep hill into Wantage, and then turn westward along a road which has been newly and quite inexplicably labelled Lambourn. It is true that you can reach that town by turning off the road on to a by-way over the downs, but if you do not do this you will reach, in time, Swindon. Keep straight on for about seven miles. A mile out of Wantage, at the top

of a long hill, you will get a nearer sight of that view you saw from Lockinge Down, and you will agree that for sheer depth of colour it has hardly a rival. The long regiments of elms, dwindling into the distance, hold at all times a vivid blue that makes you think of peacocks' tails.

At the foot of Blowing Stone Hill keep straight on for Ashbury and Bishopstone, but look out, near Compton Beauchamp, for the new signpost that invites you to try your luck up White Horse Hill. It is a perfectly safe climb now, with widenings for passing, and the look-out from the top is unforgettable. For two-thirds of a circle you have an unbroken horizon, bounded on the north-west by the Cotswold. It is a glorious spot, and as you come cautiously down again you feel urged to pull down and burn the new notice that, in the heart of that exquisite solitude, disgustingly announces that there is a car park on the White Horse. I took that to be the Ridge Way itself. A sin past all forgiveness.

Follow the road now through Chisledon and Wroughton and south to Broad Hinton, where you climb up over Hackpen Hill and Marlborough downs, and so come into Marlborough, where you find the road that runs beside the River Kennet through Ramsbury and Chilton Foliat, that lovely English village. Here take the Wantage road again (not the Lockinge one), but leave it when you come to the Roman road that runs from Cirencester to Speen. It is Ermine Street, and you turn to your right along it till you reach the turning off to Boxford on the Lambourn river. As I have shown, you can either turn off for Wantage at Shefford or, a far better plan, follow the beautiful little valley to its end and then rejoin the Wantage-Streatley road at either Ashbury or Westcot. I advise the former way, as it takes you over the downs past Ashdown Park, a peculiarly lovely road. But you can see for yourself what a rare choice of ways lie before you. All are, to the lover of peace, among the best in the world.

The first look, the first breath of spring on the land sends the thoughts of every English motorist to the hills. During the dark months, when even a clear day, unless there is frost, is always tinged with mist, the wealds and valleys are well enough for a day's journey, but as soon as the sun has the strength to set alight the colours of copse and hedgerow, pasture and pond, to show you what lies more than a mile or so away, it is time to put as many hundreds of feet as possible between sea-level and your car wheels. The great days of light are beginning, and there is no time to be lost. From now onwards the wise motorist will plan his wanderings with a jealous eye on the contour-markings of his maps. For him the brown patches will be the ones that really matter.

One of the best of these brown patches is that which covers the Berkshire and Wiltshire downs, dominating the Vale of the White Horse on the north and the valleys of the trout country on the south, by Itchen and Wallop and Test. Here, never more than seventy-five miles from London, the town-bound motorist will find country as open, air as clean, spring colours, tastes, and sounds as vivid as anywhere. I have done my poor and presumptuous best to give a hint of the delights of this human part of England at most times of the year, but I can never have hoped to come within measurable distance of success when it was a question of describing it in April. It may very well be that when you read this snow will be lying thick on the roads I covered in life-giving sunshine, that an icy north-easter has routed the soft westerly breeze, strewn the sky with hurrying clouds, and driven the hardiest of travellers back to the fire-side. Even so, I beg you to have patience, to wait through the bitter days till it is bright again and the earth is alive. Nowhere do the fields and woods recover

from the torture of winter's rack and thumbscrew so swiftly as on the downs. They awake first of all among the high places.

Here is a long day's drive which will give you the best of the downs in spring, keep you out in real air for a dozen hours, and remind you once more of the debt we owe to the people who thought railways would never be wanted between the Thames and Hackpen Hill. The road over the Berkshire downs begins, for the Londoner, beyond Streatley. Just after it forks right to Oxford and left to Wantage you swing up clear of the Thames Valley and open out the true downs in what seems like a hundred yards. In a flash are gone the villas, the boat-houses, and the damp, and you are breathing real air, seeing real things. The downs are said to be grey and brown, but on a sunny April day they are gold and silver. They gleam as do no other hills I know within a hundred miles of them, and the glimpses they allow you, between their rolling shoulders, of the green-blue plains beyond are tinged with something of their own luminous quality. Railways forsooth!

It will be brisk weather by Blewbury, if not frankly chilly, and along the road to Wantage, past the Hendreds, a northerly breeze will not allow itself to be ignored. These things have no importance here, and less than none when you have left Wantage below you and have crested the long rise by King Alfred's Well and are looking down, west towards Childrey, north over limitless miles of the vale, south towards Lambourn. Here is a proper view of ancient England. And if you have a friend who clings to the patriotic belief that the Thames Valley is a fit place for man to live in, bring him here on a day of amber sunshine and show him, far off, the dark trail of Thames-side murk lying like factory smoke on the face of the country. July is as good a time as any for this inquisition. He can regard it with nothing but horror.

Four miles beyond Wantage, after the extremely dangerous Childrey 'dip'—a cross-roads you come upon without warning, after a long descent—turn up to the left to Lambourn. You have a respectable climb to the top, where the gallops are and the wind-toughened grass and the rabbits and the beech-copses, with their heads always thrown back to the east, and you revel in it. And after Lambourn of the racehorses (keep both eyes always open for these princes in their own right), you must be adventurous and take the little by-ways to Cheynes and Baydon, on your right, and Aldbourne and Ramsbury, on your left, and the lovely winding road by White Hill, Axford, and Mildenhall to Marlborough. If the Berkshire downs had only one heart, it would be identified between Lambourn and the Kennet. But they have several, as is well known.

You only get a corner of Wiltshire on this run, but as it includes the skirting of Savernake Forest, the village of Burbage, and the run to Hungerford by Shalbourne, you cannot complain of short measure. Eighteen very beautiful miles through country which gives you a great contrast to the high downs bring you to a by-way, running parallel to the Bath road, which leads to Kintbury. This is easy enough, but you will want your best map if you are to get to Aldermaston without mishap. Your main points are Hampstead Marshall and Brimpton, but many confusing little roads beguile you on either hand. After Aldermaston you cross Silchester Common to the Thames at Pangbourne, by Burghfield and Tidmarsh.

.

They are lucky brethren of the road who live near Bath in winter. With their companions in fortune of Tunbridge Wells, Cheltenham, and Malvern, to say nothing of the parts about the New Forest, they have near at hand some of the best and most beautiful of English country for their

week-end explorings, runs which can be comfortably made out and home in a day, more ambitious tours which will keep them from a Saturday morning to a Sunday evening on highways and by-ways of new and familiar delight. It would be rash to say that the Bath folk have the best of it, even though the Blagdon Hills and the run to the Exe and back by the borders of Devon and Wiltshire on a day of sparkling frost is still fresh in memory, but it is only just to rank them very high among the really lucky ones.

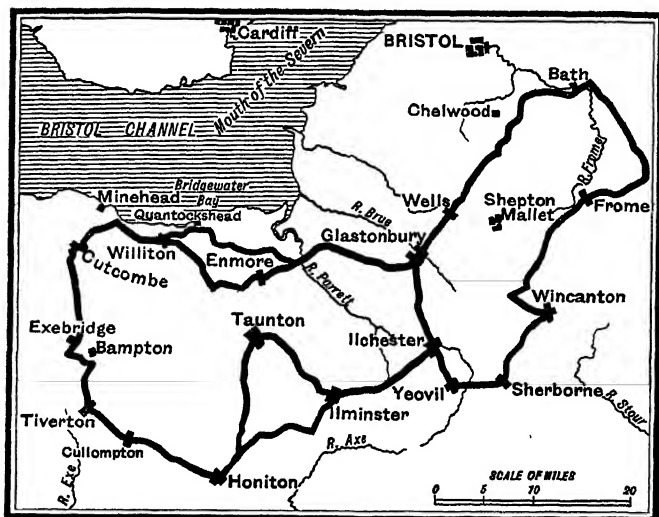
All these pleasant roads between Bridgwater Bay, the Honiton Hills, Wells, and Wincanton and Bradford-on-Avon are winter ways—that is to say, it does not matter at what time of year you travel over them. Even that winter road which runs down the valley of the Exe, and is in summer one of the five most beautiful short runs in England and Wales, loses very little of its charm in the dark months, while the rest are different in winter only in their colouring. The scenery remains as serenely lovely as ever, and you are as delighted with the hills, stark in their winter bareness, as when their woods and fields cover them with the riches of June.

You must, of course, choose your day well, lest rain or mist spoil things for you on the hill-sides as well as in the valley between the Mendips and the Quantocks; but you need not necessarily demand a day of sun and clear skies. Exmoor, the Blackdown Hills, and the levels about Glastonbury have all their special winter charm, not the least part of which is their solitude. You are not likely to meet many fellow-travellers.

To make an auspicious beginning, leave Bath by the Wells road, which begins on the way to Bristol and takes you up Stantonbury Hill and to the higher ground on the Mendips by way of Chelwood and Farrington Gurney. From the cross-roads on top of the Mendips at Chewton Edge you get a wonderful sight of open country over where

you have come from, and another over the vale as you drop down into Wells and Glastonbury.

On your way west through Bridgwater you have the Quantocks looming up on your left front, and it may be that you will be tempted to leave the arranged route round the edge of them by Quantoxhead and cut across them by Enmore and Cothelstone Hill, which boasts of the impressive



height of over a thousand feet above the sea. Nevertheless, the other is a very pleasant way, and it is best to leave it to the type of day for your decision. In the end you come by either to Williton and that perfect village, Dunster.

Here you turn up to the left to Timberscombe, and follow the beautiful winding road amongst the hills to Cutcombe and Exton, where you meet the River Exe. From here down to Exebridge you will drive very slowly indeed, enchanted by the beauty of road and river deep-buried among woods and steep hills. At Exebridge keep to the right round

Combe Head, and join the road to Tiverton by the bridge, which follows the Exe, and keep along the river and into the town. Then cut across to Cullompton and come into Honiton across the south edge of the Blackdown Hills. This little range is among the most beautiful in the south-west, and once more you must make up your mind to a slow progress. Take the London road from Honiton to about a mile beyond Monkton, and there turn to the left at Upottery, and, climbing steadily nearly all the way, get to Blagdon Hill, where a magnificent outlook awaits you.

If the state of the road allows it, turn back here and cross Staple Hill towards Ilminster, which will again bring you up to the thousand-foot level. If, however, it is in bad condition, go on into Taunton, and then take the road by Fitzpaine, and at Street Ash turn to the left for Ilminster. It is not so fine as the other way, but, none the less, it is very pleasant. You come down again into the levels at Ilminster and through a succession of peaceful villages, including Montacute, reach Yeovil.

Your way home offers you a choice. You can either bear slightly to the left and, by way of what is marked on the map as a Roman road, to Dorchester, reach at Ilchester another, no less than the Fosse Way, which leads to Bath, or, if you are in the mood for doublings and turnings, go on to Sherborne and there turn nearly over some mild hills to Compton, Pauncefoot, Bratton, Seymour, and Castle Cary. This will bring you eventually to Shepton Mallet, and the climb up to Oak Hill, a few miles east of Chewton Edge. Turn here to the right along the top of the range to Frome and Westbury, a pleasant road at the foot of the hills on which you will come across a place called Dead Maid's Corner.

You finish the run very appropriately through Bradford-on-Avon, a show-place which never seems to suffer from being so, and the road along the Avon back into Bath.



CHAPTER XVII

THE WEST COUNTRY—DEVONSHIRE AND SOMERSET—
RIVERS AND MOORS—FRIENDLY ROADS

HARD things have been said of the month of April by every type of roadfarer, but none harder than by your keen motorist. It is, he says, a month of thirty promises and quite sixty disappointments. It has the name of spring, eloquent of wild flowers, sunny days, and the beginning of comfortable fishing, and in nine cases out of ten it turns out to be the most inclement April known for thirty or sixty years. It is a month for story-tellers—true only in print. Every year the same hard things are said of April by those who plan their first tours for the longer days.

Yet, notwithstanding certain occasional lapses, there is one corner (in this case a correct description) where it is nearly always much as the writers paint it. In the West Country, between the Torridge and the Exe, the mouth of the Severn and the Tamar, April is really a month of late spring and not a throw-back to winter. In the borders of Devon, and Somerset, and Cornwall, one of the real corners of England, you will be very unlucky if you do not find sunshine and fair skies, gorse and daffodils in riotous bloom, clean air and radiant light among the hills. Down in the coves and under the gaunt headlands, where the

Atlantic endlessly mends its fringe of foam, the sea has lost its winter grey. It is alive again, and blue.

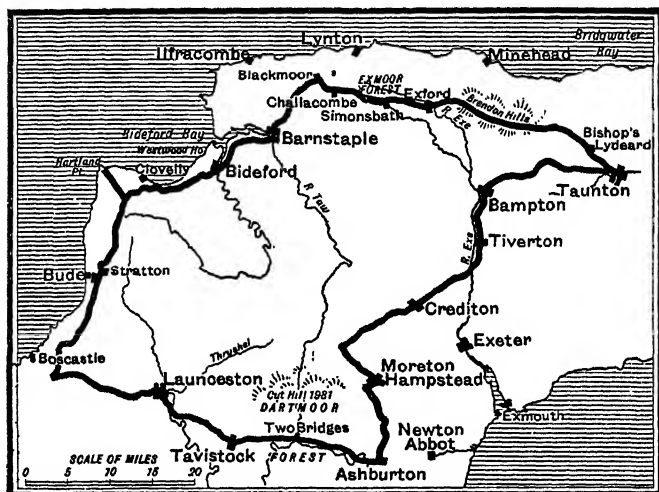
For very decency I cannot say that there is no place like Devon. At this moment, writing with a view of some thirty miles' extent in front of my note-pad, I am perfectly certain that there is not, but I have an uneasy feeling that I may have said the same thing about other parts of England, such as the Cotswolds, parts of Sussex, Yorkshire, and the New Forest, Dorset, and the Lakes—practically anywhere, in fact, except where there are streets. So I must be satisfied to say that in April, when the weather is fair, you can be as happy in Devon as in any place in the world.

This I can certainly say without a sense of guilt—there is no part of England I would sooner tour in a car at this time of year. In June I need the Lakes and other places, but just at this time there is nothing to compare with the long, leisurely drive to the country of tors and streams, of open moorland, of roads winding giddily round blind corners, and up and down hills which bring a gasp to the throat of the uninitiated, an extra heart-beat to those who know and love them.

There is not very much of Somerset in this particular April tour in the West Country, but what there is you will like. It begins at Bishop's Lydeard, near Taunton, where you turn off the regularly-ordained way to Minehead and abandon yourself to the Exmoor by-roads. You cannot take them fast, however fast your car may be, and if you tried to I hope the ghosts of the Doones and their friends would see to it that you regretted it. They are very old, these moor-ways, and they exact respect.

Down from the high places you come to that lovely estuary which serves the Taw and the Torridge alike for their escape to the sea, and to Barnstaple, the town with the best country market in the world; and Bideford, ancient and Spanish-looking, with one of the finest old bridges in

the kingdom. Two Devon towns of high degree, they are of that very rare kind which one would deliberately turn aside from a country cruise to visit. They belong to the sea and the hills and the rivers. It is a great run along those eight miles between the two, by Fremington and Instow, with Appledore across the water, and old Northam, and the long perspective of Bideford Bridge at the end of it.



From Bideford you must go towards Hartland Point. Clovelly lies on the way—or, rather, just off it—and at this private time of year can be safely visited. Did you know that the bay contains the Bight a Doubleyou? Or that just short of Hartland Point there is Shipload Bay, and eight miles down the coast Lucky Hole? After these the notorious Woolfardisworthy, with its less popular Aldfardisworthy, have scarcely any existence as place-names.

Keep on down that familiar but friendly road to Stratton and Bude, Boscastle and Tintagel, where you turn up inland to Launceston and come within sight of the heart

of your journey. As you follow the road towards Tavistock, most dignified of old county towns, where the tobacconist sells fishing tackle of the most alluring kind and cuts your hair afterwards, you raise, in sea-parlance, the heads of Dartmoor, the greatest of them all in beauty, if not in size. You need not wonder whether the gorse will be in colour or not. Unless there is fog, Dartmoor has always a thousand more colours than you can count.

Straight up from the town that wonderful Ashburton road carries you to twelve hundred feet above the sea, and for the next eighteen miles, till you are at Ashburton, you are driving up and down the eaves on the roof of the world, lost in an expanse of such wild beauty as you will agree is unmatched—at all events in April. Take particular notice of your surroundings at the top of Two Bridges Hill, at Cherrybrook Bridge, at Dartmeet Bridge, and, above all, at the top of New Bridge Hill, where Holne Chase lies out on your left, the most beautiful wood ever planted.

More adventures await you after Ashburton, when you take the moorland roads to Moreton Hampstead. If you shirk the real thing, you can get there by way of Bickington and Bovey Tracey, but you will regret it. You must not leave Dartmoor with a main road in your memory. There are very few of them, and they have an apologetic air, as is only right. A cross-road by Crediton and Tiverton brings you to Bampton, where you join the Taunton road over the bridge. The last run is through Somerset again, and, I am inclined to think, through the best of it. It is a very beautiful run.

.

Of the three principal rivers of North Devon, the Torridge, the Taw, and the Exe, it may at least be said that they run very conveniently for the roadfarer in search of the beauties of their valleys. Much more is to be said of them

as three of the best-known and best-loved English streams, but their course deserves the special gratitude of the motorist who has tried to plan an unbroken tour along other rivers and failed to make a proper job of it, either because the rivers were too far from the roads or because of a lack of roads connecting the valleys. You cannot follow every mile of the North Devon rivers by road, but with only a little trouble you can lay a course which will take you through the greater length of their valleys in turn and form in itself a particularly pleasant way of seeing that incomparable county from a fresh angle.

It is still considered by those who should know better (some owners of practicable motor cars and reliable maps, for example) that Devonshire, as a part of England to be explored, consists of Dartmoor, Exmoor, Torquay, Lynmouth, and Clovelly, a vague locality of steep hills, cream, and picture postcards. The seaside places are familiar enough to them, as are the steep hills which conduct you to them, but of the interior, away from the show-places, many protesting lovers of Devon who go year after year to the same places on the coast seem to know little enough.

By following the valleys of these three rivers, or the greater part of them, the motorist whose notion of this one of the many best counties in England is based on the obvious, will be shown new things of which he has had no hint, and will realize that what he already knows of Devon is but a small part of the truth. Between the Somerset border and Hartland Point lies some of the most beautiful of typical English scenery. Except on the moor-tops the country is of that rich, secluded, established order peculiar to England alone, fenced yet free, full of great parks, ancient timber, and enduring peace, private, intimate property which seems to belong to itself more than to its owners, to the Englishman at large first of all. Other counties have this quality, in particular Herefordshire, Gloucestershire,

and parts of Warwickshire, but none so unmistakably as Devonshire.

Take Exeter as a convenient starting and finishing point, and set out westward to find the Torridge beyond Hatherleigh. There are by-ways to tempt you off the Okehampton road, but except the one to Moreton Hampstead, on your left just outside Exeter, none of them will show you better country than is to be seen from the highway. The Moreton-Hampstead-Okehampton road carries you under the edge of Dartmoor and the sight of those gold and purple hills, empty of everything but colour, makes a proper send-off to a cruise among the quiet places. You turn your back on it at Okehampton and a mile or so beyond Hatherleigh meet the Torridge at Hele Bridge, a brook here which spends its infancy, out of your reach, in idle wandering until it comes to depth and discretion at Torrington.

Here you begin a short but beautiful run by the river to the estuary which serves both Torridge and Taw, and can be regarded as the mouth of either. You have the Torridge on your left after Bideford at least as far as Instow, and between Fremington and Barnstaple the Taw, which is to be your companion until it leaves the road some twenty miles farther south, beyond Eggesford. Keep straight on along the Exeter road but at Crediton turn off to the left and cut across country to the Exe valley at Cadleigh, a few miles short of Tiverton, as it is hardly worth while going down to the fork above Exeter for the sake of the road through Stoke Canon.

After Tiverton the road through the valley of the Exe is nothing less than exquisite. It twists and turns bewilderingly, the corners are blind and to be taken with every caution, but the slower your progress the deeper your delight. The hills above close in steadily, here pinching the valley to a ravine, there loosening their hold for a moment and letting it open into a bowl in which all summer seems to be stored.

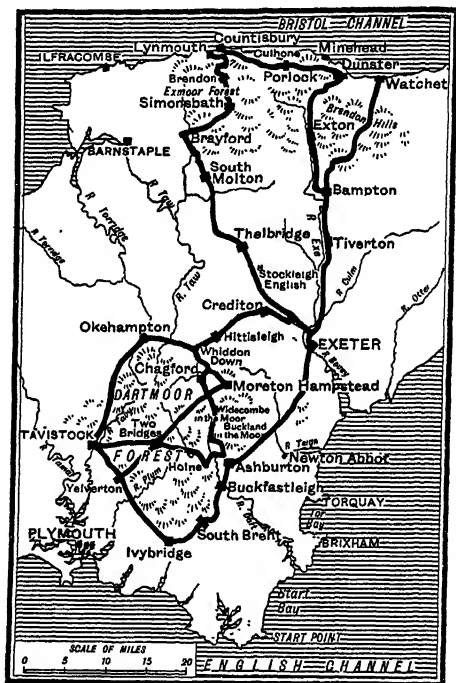
A mile before Bampton cross the river to the left and make the circuit of Combe Head, joining the Bampton-Dunster road at Exebridge. Once more you have a twisting road by the river, but at Exton you are left to finish your journey alone, for the Exe departs abruptly for the high places in the west—if you look at it in that way. Seven miles from Dunster, at Wheddon Cross, a road on your right will take you over the Brendon Hills to Wiveliscombe. The surface is bad and it suffers from a disadvantage common to many Devonshire lanes in having high hedges. Perhaps it is wiser to follow the road down to Dunster and come round to Wiveliscombe by Monksilver and Elworthy. You return to Exeter either by Tiverton or Cullompton.

.

On the face of it, it would be absurd to say that any single part of England, north, south, east, or west, a hundred miles out of London, is a better place to be in during May than any other. Beauty of the special English sort, which is to say the best, lies in abundance at almost any point of the compass, and you need only a good car and a good set of maps, patience of the kind which is its own reward, and the spirit of the explorer, to find, along well-worn paths, new proofs every day of how little you know of the land you live in. There is no end to the discovery of most ancient England, there can be no single one of her lovers who does not find, every time he sets out to familiar places, that if only the half has been told him, a tenth of it is all he has seen for himself.

If it is agreed that it is idle to compare one county or district with another, it must be admitted that in early summer most of them are at their best—even in that reluctant admission one remembers days in September and October when there seems to be no question but that autumn is more beautiful than spring—and this not only because it is not

the crowded holiday season, but because everything is new and unspoilt. The red and gold of autumn are, at the exact moment, the most beautiful of the colours which are never found on any painter's palette, rarer perhaps than any



jade or silver of spring, but they are the end. With their fading the light and colour of the world this side of the Straits of Dover die out for another six months. The colours of May, exquisite in their freshness, are heralds of the good days.

These are the two months in all the twelve when you will see the western moors at the height of their beauty, May and October. In those eight weeks there are very few

places in the kingdom in which you will be happier in your car. The riper loveliness of June is still a miracle, but once May is out you know that you will get less and less of it to yourself, that more and more people, less lucky than you in the arrangement of their year's work, will be hurrying to Exmoor and Dartmoor. And there is nobody more naturally selfish than a lover of England. We must have her alone. We praise her with the utmost enthusiasm, but we would do better to hold our tongues. She becomes another Sylvia, a lady of countless swains.

Now is the time to find out, for the twentieth time, how little you know of those glowing moors. You may be contemptuously familiar with most of the roads by which you may explore them, but what you see in 1933 is as different from what you saw in 1930 as if you were in a new country. They may have remade the roads over Exmoor, and the special place on Dartmoor may be on every picture post-card, but it makes no difference in May. You will drive in peace, in perfect selfishness, unharassed by the other swains, and if you find a cemented highway where you last saw a moorland road, all stones and dust and potholes, take the good with the better, make better of the best. It is not the road you have come to see, but what lies beyond and around it.

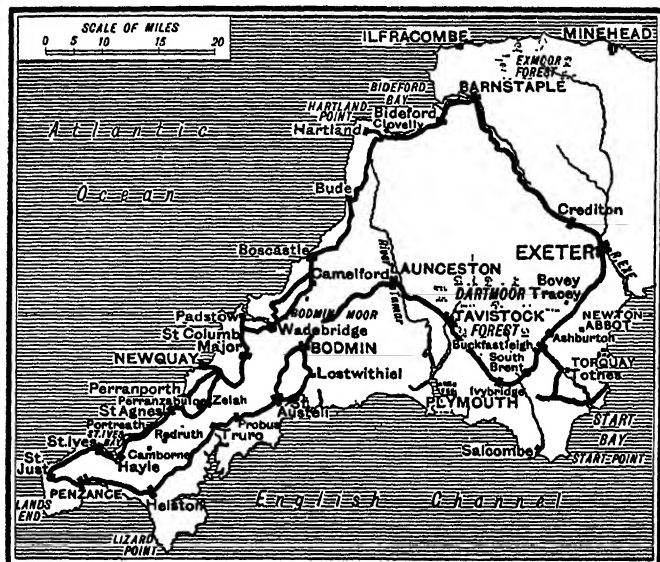
Begin your cruise through the moors at Watchet and make southwards over the Brendon Hills, high above the Taunton Vale, to the Exe at Bampton. Here you must turn off the Barnstaple road and follow the river northwards to Dunster. This takes you through the most beautiful part of the whole of the Exe valley, a winding road, deep buried in woods, curling round pools where the trees reach down to finger the slow swirl of the peat-brown water, a road only just permitted to creep between the bluff shoulders of the moor. It is here that you will begin to forget time.

You skirt Minehead, after Dunster, and take the old familiar road to Porlock, up the toll road and out on to the roof of the world by Culbone Hill and County Gate where, at a thousand feet above the Bristol Channel at your feet, you leave Somerset for Devonshire. The word 'hackneyed' has no application to any English road except the first half of the Bath road and, at most times of the year, the whole of the Great North Road. The way from Porlock to Lynmouth, a show-place for a quarter of a century at least, will alone give you proof of that. It is never the same.

In Lynmouth, after that last most cautious descent to sea-level, turn up the Lyn Valley to Watersmeet and then on and up, higher and higher to Brendon Two Gates, where you are in the very heart of the moor. The inevitable crossways lie at Simonsbath, two miles on, but Two Gates is the place. You climb a little more, to about 1,440 feet, and again, taking the right-hand fork, to fifteen hundred or so by Spanhead, whence you drop down to the valley of the Bray at Brayford, and begin to cross the neutral ground to Dartmoor.

Your pleasantest way there lies by South Molton and the by-ways through Thelbridge and Stockleigh English and Crediton. Here you cut across country to Whiddon Down and Moreton Hampstead, joining the first of the two roads which cut Dartmoor neatly into four slices. Bear directly south-west across the moor, past Two Bridges, to Yelverton, turn up to Tavistock and come back eastwards along that great road which gives you the greatest alliance of views and exciting climbs of any I know. All descents need great caution and most ascents need sound engines. None but the best brakes are of any use. After the long swoop down to Holne Bridge, turn up to the left along the wonderful road to Buckland-in-the-Moor, Widecombe-in-the-Moor, and the moorland of tiny hamlets, which will bring you out to Chagford and the Moreton road. You

have crossed Dartmoor in two directions, and it only remains for you to make the circuit of it. Keep on to the westward to Okehampton and then follow the road round to Tavistock and Ivybridge, South Brent, Buckfastleigh, and Ashburton, and you will have seen, in miniature, one of the greatest expanses in the world. You cannot spend a



May week-end in better company than among gorse clumps, little streams and the sea as it looks from the young heather which crowns the cliffs a thousand feet above it.

It was a perfect October day when I found myself once more on the roads which, on every day of at least ten months in the year, tug irrepressibly at the heart of the lover of England. In July and August I prefer to leave

the valleys and moors of Devonshire to their temporary invaders, not grudgingly, heaven knows, but because it is only during those two months that they are not at their best. Even in the depths of what used to be known as a real English winter, when the snowdrifts reached to the eaves of the moorland inn, the wild ponies came nightly in timid companies to whinny just outside the rays of our room lights, begging for food they knew well was not there, afraid to risk a nearer approach, and the icy north-easter roared day and night across the empty wastes of Dartmoor, even then was the special beauty of Devonshire plain for him to see who had his heart in his eyes.

In July and August, it seems to me (at any other time of the year) that loveliness is dimmed. The glory of high summer is past, the greater splendour of autumn is still to come. Everything must rest, and that is when Exmoor and Dartmoor slip into their yearly doze. Optimistic fishermen flog their little streams for a fortnight at a time, there are many picnic parties in the heather, the blue and red beaches are alive with sun- and sea-bathers, but the shallows of the Dart, the Teign, and the Lyn, the sweep of the heather to the skyline of Exmoor, even that incomparable reach between Exford and Exebridge, all are drowsy, their life slowed down.

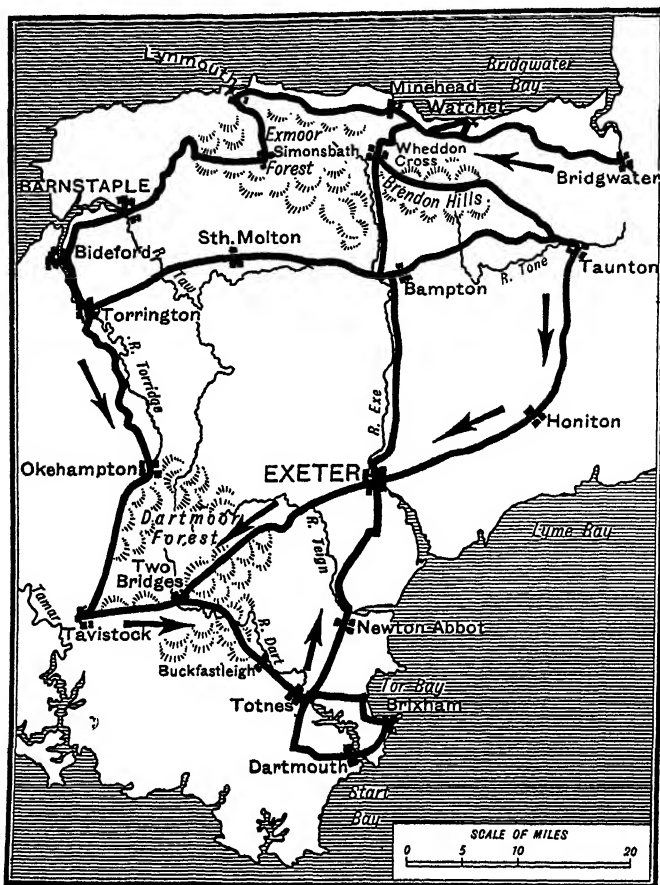
There was no drowsiness about them that perfect October day. There had been a little rain in the night and I knew not which to look at longest, the little rivers sparkling under the red and yellow of the chestnuts and beeches overhanging their curving pools, the crimson rocks standing in snow along the blue sea's edge, the far prospect of the moors themselves, alive with the cobalt shadows of the racing clouds above. The air was a deep draught of health itself, spiced with the savours of a land of hills and sea, and though it was an October day the light was strong enough to make you blink.

I was two days over my third reconnaissance that year, and I should be put to it to tell you precisely where I went. I drove as other lovers of Devonshire drive when they return to her. I went as much as possible along roads I liked for their own sake, as little as possible to towns. I climbed some notable hills, and I followed at least three rivers as far as I could. I did a good deal of deliberate trespassing, and more than once I came back the way I went. I saw some intimate Devonshire. I give you the main outline of that cruise, but many of the details you must fill in for yourself. For there is no doubt that once you are at liberty amongst those hills and valleys you will have little use for printed itineraries.

As I came down to that best of all English counties by way of Bath and Wells and across the Somerset flats to Bridgwater, I made that placid town the starting-point of a crazy-pavement tour. Go first to Minehead, being careful to branch off through Watchet on the way in order to meet the Bristol Channel elsewhere than at that modish resort. Then go straight on through Porlock—quite its own self now—and up on to Culbone Hill, where awaits you a view over sea and moor you will not soon forget. Come down Countisbury Hill, very cautiously indeed, into Lynmouth, and then follow the valley of the Lyn past Watersmeet till you come out into the open and to Simonsbath. For the thousandth time you will be enchanted by the everlasting loveliness of those few miles.

Turn to the right at Simonsbath for Blackmoor Gate (just after you cross the stream Barle you are over thirteen hundred feet up) and then come down into Barnstaple, the friendliest town in all the west. If you can, choose a market day and buy your roadside lunch, piping hot pasties and all, not forgetting the sausage-rolls. It is only in Barnstaple that they know how to make these things. If anything could comfort you for the onset

of English winter it would be an open-air lunch bought in Barnstaple.



Bideford comes next, after that pleasant waterside drive, and then Torrington and the drive across country to South Molton, where you join the main road to Bampton and Taunton. Turn south here over the Blackdown Hills for

Exeter and Dartmoor. If it is actually possible to avoid Exeter I doubt if the long detour is worth while. It is a friendly enough place, and there is no sufficient reason to dodge it. Now take the road to Moreton Hampstead and the very heart of the moor at Two Bridges, where you meet the Tavistock-Ashburton road. This is one of the several things you came to see, and you must arrange to be here at high noon, with all the day before you. If you started late you can make a short cut across from Torrington to Okehampton and Tavistock, as I have shown.

You have the Dart with you or near you on your way to Buckfastleigh and its new abbey, and you will only see the last of it at Dartmouth. For it is essential that you should go to Totnes and to Halwell to get to Kingswear. The supreme beauty of the Dart estuary is in its upper reaches, but the only roads that go there are those that serve the Greenway-Dittisham and the Stoke Gabriel ferries. Perhaps it is as well.

Your way homeward is through Brixham and Totnes, Newton Abbot, and over Great Haldon Hill back into Exeter, where you take the road along the Exe valley past Bampton to Wheddon Cross. It may be that you will declare the last thirty miles the best of all, particularly where the Ouarme and the Barle meet the Exe—there and elsewhere. Twenty miles along the top of the Brendon Hills bring you back into Taunton, eleven miles south of Bridgwater.

.

There is a bracing quality, the suggestion of high adventure, in the request I had at the end of the year for a pleasant return journey from Leeds to Barnstaple, in Devonshire. You might think little of it in summer, when as many thousands find their way from the becks and fells to the Atlantic coast as from the Taw and the Torridge to the

Swale. Those are the months when all sorts of wonderful journeys are undertaken light-heartedly by all sorts of quite untravelled people, when those who have never ventured, either by car or bicycle, beyond the country town suddenly go agreeably mad and precipitate themselves, their children, their dogs and such of their immense luggage as is not discovered hours later to have been left behind, into lands as strange, if not as distant, as Bohemia.

That is brave. It is a defiance of convention, though whether, in view of the outworn misuses of the word, it can still be called a gesture, I am far from sure. To drive in mid-January from what is, if it will forgive me, the darkest town I know in the habitable world, across the length of England on the chance of finding light at journey's end, is something much more. It is heroic. True, you may arrive in a blaze of sunshine nearly as bright as, and certainly more invigorating than, the article supplied at about the same time of year at Cannes or Mentone (that slick fraud), but it is quite possible that you will find it nearly as dark as Leeds—not from that singular black rain that falls so freely on the northern town, but from the exuberance of the Atlantic winds.

Their darkness, as you and I know very well, is only a prickly veil of wet salt, the cleanest thing on earth, and, though it may easily last three days at a time, there is nothing but health in it. I am only thinking of the Leeds man who expected to find a land where they never turn on the light before lunch. I think well of this pilgrimage. Whether you find it or not, there is no better thing to look for than sunshine. In the blackest of winters I have never lunched by artificial light within one hundred miles of Barnstaple.

This is the way you should go there and back—or at least one of them. It is a national disaster that our main sources of wealth should have been put where they are, making it impossible to drive north and south without

having to dodge at least two centres of them; but on an occasion like this, when so much black and grey country must be traversed and so much of it, so to speak, after lunch, when the light must be turned on, I had no sympathy with the Leeds man. He must have had quite a measurable degree of the pleasure we get out of landing in piercing cold and dark rain at Calais to face the long wonderful road to the wine-coloured sea.

I left him to find his own way to Doncaster. It goes through Pontefract, which is all that it is necessary for any one starting from Leeds to know. Nor will you take much interest in the next stage through Tickhill to Worksop and Chesterfield (unless the January sky lets you see the remarkable kink in the church steeple), but by Baslow and Bakewell, where you come suddenly into the pleasantest part of Derbyshire, high up on the hills, you will see why you came at all. There is light here, and free air, and when you get to Buxton and sniff that bracing wind off the Peak, you will be as eager for the far-away gleam of Devonshire as anybody at Calais for the smell of the stocks on the Roquebrune road.

Follows a good deal of discipline. It will be mighty cold by Leek and Stone and Newport, cold, and, unless the sun relents, grey, but once you reach Bridgnorth, having twisted your way with some skill between the Potteries and Birmingham, you are set fair on your road to the south. And a great road it is. You follow the Severn valley for close upon fifty miles, and after Gloucester, as far as Bristol at least, you are within reach of it in its period of elderly spread, where it begins to call itself the Bristol Channel. You have Worcester and Tewkesbury, the Cotswold Hills by Winchcomb (it may easily be snowing here, but it is decorative rather than detestable), Gloucester itself and with a beautiful run on either side, Bristol, the most romantic city in England.

Then come the Mendips and Bridgwater, Watchet-on-

the-Sea, Dunster, and the run over Exmoor to Barnstaple. You have come south, and whatever weather you may meet it will not be of the Leeds variety.

From Barnstaple to Frome, at least, you are still in southern weather, and you begin by following the River Taw on your way to Crediton, where you cut across country to Tiverton, the crest of the Blackdown Hills, Wellington, and Taunton. There are other ways which will suggest themselves as you arrive, but this is a good one. Thenceforward from Taunton to Frome and Hungerford, over the downs to Faringdon, over the Cotswold to Chipping Norton and Warwick—mercifully most neglected of ancient English towns—where you turn eastward for Stamford and Lincoln, you are, for the most part, in delightful country. It is very likely to be cold, but until you touch the fringes of low Yorkshire at Bawtry you should have real daylight when you need it.

.

■

PART VII

ON THE EDGE OF LONDON

■



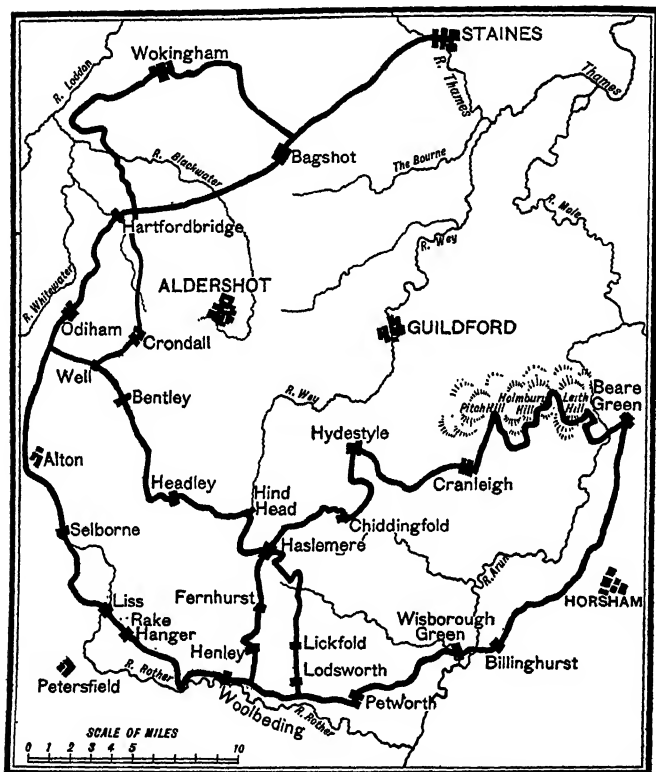
CHAPTER XVIII

BY-WAYS ROUND GUILDFORD—THE CHILTERN—THE
GOLDEN TREES—THEIR SILVER LEAVES

You can hardly blame the Londoner who complains that while they preserve this or that beauty spot for the delight of his descendants, they allow the approaches to them to be overbuilt, and that he must henceforward regard as lost territory nearly all his own special Home Counties, the borders of Surrey and Sussex, Hampshire and Kent. West and south the new roads increase year by year, with every mile creeping nearer to the commons and little by-ways that lead to beauty and solitude; month by month, he must believe that the invasion of things that matter by things that must be made in the manner of mass-produced motor cars, is just upon its terrible completion. On how many of the main roads has there broken out, in the past few months, an eruption of abominable little dwellings, standing hateful in red and blue rows, making a nightmare street of a plain road, spoiling everything and achieving not even the merit of being conceivable abodes?

His case seems hopeless, unanswerable, but if he will take his car and, disregarding all warnings as to the probable state of the roads round any of half a dozen beauty spots,

go out even on a fine Sunday and follow the routes I have traced, he will discover afresh the perpetual miracle of the English country-side—that it is as nearly as possible im-



mortal. Just off a roaring high road; a mile from the rendezvous of charabancs; almost within sight of barracks—probably within sound of range-practice; he will find himself alone in real country.

This is perhaps not exactly true of the environs of the Southend road, but it is certainly true of all other roads

leading out of London, most particularly, as I think now, of the Portsmouth, Southampton, and Worthing roads. I take, as an example, Staines as a point of departure and return and not because there is real country worth the search anywhere near it. It is not until you have passed Bagshot and got on to Hartford Bridge Flats, where the rolling expanse of heather announces it, that you know you are on the edge of the open. If you want your deliverance from people in the mass to be effective, turn off at Bagshot for Wokingham and come down through Swallowfield, Finchampstead, Eversley Cross and the rhododendrons and the ferns to the heather.

Except for Fleet, your road through Crondall and Bentley is practically innocent of red brick, and instead a wonderful oak wood bears you company on your left hand for miles, as far as Kingsley. I thought I knew this country well, but that wood is new. It cannot be less than two hundred years old, and it must be four miles long, yet I discovered it—after how many years? The sun shone out of the first fair sky of the year and it may have brought about some kind of transmutation, so that a few neighbouring spinneys became a forest, a familiar slope a miniature hill-range in a strange land. These things often happen to people who like England.

At Sleaford you get very close to charabancs, beauty spots, and armies; but, after inevitably and agreeably losing your way round Batt's Corner and Dockenfield and Headley and Arford, you come up the road to Grayshott and Hindhead. Here may be charabancs, it is true, but they are strictly controlled, and you will scarcely notice them as you take the road down to Haslemere, the road which branches to the left.

And now comes some of the best of the day's drive. Climb up Blackdown Way and find the little road down to the valley which takes you through Dial Green and Lodsworth, perhaps the loveliest by-way in Surrey. At the cross-roads

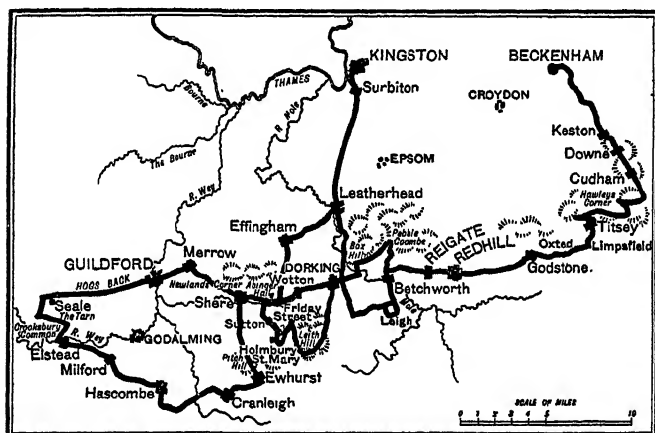
turn to the left and by Petworth and Wisborough Green find your way to that extraordinary trio of hills, Leith, Holmbury, and Pitch, round and over which you can drive for an hour in measureless content. Whether I have been specially lucky, I cannot say, but I have spent many days at all times of the year hereabouts and never yet seen a crowd.

At Cranleigh you go back by winding ways, through Loxhill and Hydestyle and Chiddingfold, to Haslemere and, starting the second half of your crazy figure of eight, come south again by the Fernhurst road, in May at its most glorious. All about here the gorse is dazzling, and the canopies of blossom, all the way into Hampshire, rise like clouds of white smoke from every garden cottage. Be careful not to go down as far as Midhurst, but to turn off to the right along the Woolbeding road to Iping. Here you get matchless views of the South Downs over the tops of the woods in the valley.

When you have passed Iping bear to the right and enter that perfect arrangement of little steep hills and silver beeches, gorse and spruce and larch, which lies between the downs and the Portsmouth road. At the crossways take the road to Rake Hanger and Liss and get back eventually, and as slowly as possible, to the Bagshot road by Empshott and Selborne and the pleasant country round Odiham. You will have seen some of the best of three counties, you will have seen most of it alone, and you will have never been more than fifty miles from Hyde Park Corner.

In at least one respect the London motorist is far luckier than most of those who live in other capitals of Europe. There are agreeable days to be spent on the road near Paris, Rome, Madrid, but none of these cities has anything half so attractive as the hills of Surrey. Berne may have its Alps, Madrid the sweeping climb up to the Escorial, Paris

the forest of Fontainebleau, but not one of these can really hold a candle to the long line of wooded hills that stretch from Guildford well into Kent. From some aspects they may be more obviously picturesque, the road that leads to the knees of the Guadarramas, the great French forest and the rest, but the Surrey hills beat them all in the one essential quality. Although they are almost within the limits of the city's suburbs, you can find hidden places in them, particu-



larly at this time of year, where there is no faintest suggestion of any town, let alone of the biggest in the world.

They are incredibly private. Nearly all English scenery is, but those uplands of Surrey hold more surprises than any part of the Home Counties, as any one who passes through them regularly will agree. The town is surely, if slowly, advancing over them, but it is meeting with the stoutest resistance, gaining a foothold only in isolated places. With a cluster of new villas on one side, a golf-course and a new road on the other, there is still many a quiet retreat within twenty miles of Charing Cross that shows no sign of defeat.

An example of this, chosen haphazard, is the tiny valley

that lies on the eastern flank of Box Hill. A mile to the south of it lies the concrete road to Redhill and Betchworth station. Reigate and Dorking are almost within sight east and west, north is Walton Heath golf-course. Yet when you drive up from the level crossing at Betchworth to the top of Pebblecombe Hill, you are surrounded by beech-grown hills and chalk cliffs as free from offence as any in the Chilterns. Another, a little to the westward, is Ranmore Common and the road between Dorking and East Horsley, a third the road from Pitch Hill to Shere.

All these folds in the hills and many more have been miraculously saved from destruction for many years, and, seeing their triumph over the enemy is still maintained in the face of every known form of attack, including envelopment, we should be hopeful of the result. The best of the Surrey hills will be left alone at least in our time.

There are more ways than one of planning a winter's day among them, as you may imagine, but I know of none I prefer to this. Take the road to Keston Common, by way of Westminster Bridge, Camberwell Green, Champion Hill, and Beckenham. A mile beyond Keston itself take the left-hand road to Downe and Cudham, and at the top of the hill bear again to the right for Hawley's Corner, which is at the summit of Westerham Hill. Come down this, using a good deal of precaution and mistrusting the easy look of the gradient (it is one in seven), and turn to the right at the cross-roads, where you will join the Pilgrim's Way.

Here the road runs on a shelf above the friendliest little valley, where is an ideal site for a sun-lover's home. It runs east and west, and all winds but the south and west must be deflected from it. Some fortunate being built one of the most charming of modern houses here soon after the war and I never pass it without a pang of envy. It has already a settled look, and fits in perfectly with the land-

scape, but it is the steep slope behind and north of it, crowned with deep woods, that give it its strongest appeal. The sun shines all day upon it.

The road comes out at the top of Titsey Hill, and you turn left to come down it into Limpsfield and Oxted, show-places if you like, but none the less delightful. This is the time of year for seeing them, when their life is normal once more and the passer-by is a traveller rather than a tripper—whichever you may regard yourself to be. They are really very beautiful, a fact that is likely to escape you in the summer holidays. After Godstone the road through Redhill and Reigate must be endured, but not even the concrete track which has replaced the old winding way by the brook that was so picturesque and so dangerous has availed to spoil the scenery.

At the Betchworth cross-roads you have a choice of ways. You can either turn up to the right and see if I am right about the little valley below Pebblecombe Hill, or turn to the left for Leigh. If you take the first, you reach Dorking by way of Box Hill and Burford Bridge. It is, on almost any sort of day, exquisite, but the surface of Box Hill is very bad. The other way you go through Leigh, which is, to my thinking, one of the most attractive villages in Surrey; yet I would risk the potholes and mud of the Box Hill way for the sake of the winding road down into the valley. The famous view from the top is not what it was, but that is the fault of other towns than London.

After Dorking you follow the hill road to Leith Hill, to Friday Street, back to Holmbury St. Mary, to Sutton and Shere, six miles or more of absolute loveliness. And at Shere you begin on another road of the same sort to Pitch Hill and Ewhurst, where you go westwards to Hascombe and Milford. Cross the Portsmouth road at Milford and go down into the valley of the Wey by Elstead and the woods and commons that lie around the Tarn, a rush-

bound pond with a northern name dreaming forgotten between two roaring highways. This is one of Surrey's most enchanting surprises.

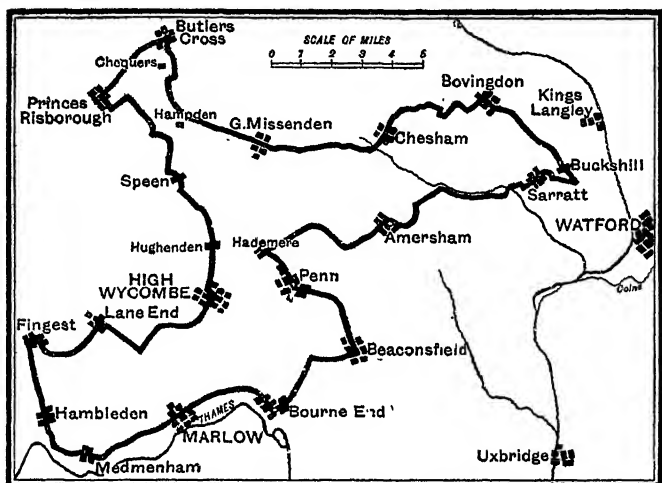
You come out on to the end of the Hog's Back by Seale, and your way home lies through Guildford and Merrow, over Newlands Corner to Shere once more, and then over White Downs to Effingham, on the Leatherhead road. If the weather has been very wet it would be wiser to take the Dorking way, as the road by Effingham can be very slippery as well as rough.

.

Although England is full of secret places where the first primroses and wood violets abound, there is one very special corner for the car-owner who lives in the Home Counties: one, particularly convenient for the lucky inhabitants of the Sussex Weald, on Blackdown Hill, near Haslemere; the other, admirably planned for the Londoner, in the Chiltern Hundreds. Here, in the shelter of the finest woods in all south Britain, he will find the first delicate footprints of spring more clearly marked than anywhere east of the Scillies. It never seems to matter what ugly March weather may be raging in the plains below. Year after year, almost in the teeth of blizzards and east winds, gales, and torrents, spring seems to alight first on the hills west and south of London, and to stay there longer than anywhere else.

During the odd month of March, when the weather gives you anything from skating to a heat-wave, there can be no better use for a car than a day-long hunt for the wild flowers which mean so much to us who must drag out our winters without colour. They have excellent taste in the matter of desirable residences, and grow at their best and most extravagantly in the little by-ways, where even to-day passers-by are few, whether afoot or awheel. You must use a big-scale map and set out resolved not to be deterred

by any farm lane, however narrow and rutted. The first spring drive of the year is a pilgrimage of the most important kind, and all the penalties of pilgrimages must be endured. Endured? Enjoyed, rather, to the utmost. It is still mercifully possible to get lost in English lanes. Make the most of the chance while it lasts. When new laws and regulations are made, efficient signposts will complete the



dreadful work of the concrete roads, and we shall have as much privacy in Buckinghamshire woods and Surrey hills as in a formal garden, where you pay to go in.

Go in spring to the woods round Great Hampden and Missenden, to the hills between Watlington and High Wycombe. In that patch of ancient England, still allowed to be at peace, you will find heaps of tumbled treasure for your trouble, new-born beauty for the asking. Banks, big and deep and overhanging, with roots of oaks planted in the youth of the Stuarts binding them still, will be glowing with primroses, the flowers of hope, absurd specks of that

most delicate yellow which you are always ready to swear must show as brightly in the dusk as at noon; and in the glades, round the beech-boles, will be very good company, dressed in other shy colours.

Take the road to the Hundreds, having for your turning-point the glory of the view from Kop Hill by Princes Risborough, and follow the crazy-pattern way which takes you through what is still left to us of Buckinghamshire. It is difficult to find peace until you are free of Watford, and although lanes still exist off the by-passes it is not worth while following them, as they all die swift and hideous deaths in a mile or two. Use the by-pass as a street and look upon it as such until you are within a mile or so of King's Langley. There turn off to the left to Buckshill and then to the right for Bovington and Chesham.

That will be your first pleasant surprise. Within earshot almost of that most suburban road to Berkhamstead lies a bit of real country, miniature if you like, but genuine enough. Little woods, little hills, little commons, bracken and gorse, wide lanes striking royally across country as if they were great rides in a private wood, it is all a splendid gift to the Londoner, and it is hard to believe that Charing Cross lies only twenty-five miles away as the crow flies. And after Chesham you climb up into the primrose country. At Great Missenden you cross the high road and take to the woods through Hampden, and twisting north past Chequers, come to Butler's Cross on the edge of the hills. Sharp left here and down to Princes Risborough, under Whiteleaf, and then up that magnificent hill from the crest of which you see half Oxfordshire spread out under that fathomless sea of blue, crowded with dazzling cloud-ships, which only an English day in March can show you.

Then more winding ways through the beeches and primroses and most heavenly silence to Speen and past Hughenden into High Wycombe in the vale. Here you are at the

division of the London Hills, and the scenery changes. As you go through Lane End on your way to Skirmett, you notice that the colours of the hills are different. They are less richly wooded, but that does not seem to account for it. They are beautiful in a different way, and that is just the usual piece of luck you get when you least expect it on a drive in England.

At the end of that road you find Hambleton and the way past Medmenham Abbey to Marlow. There is not very much to be said for the road through Bourne End and Wooburn to Beaconsfield, but it is less hackneyed perhaps than the usual way home by Maidenhead. At Beaconsfield I should turn off to the left and go to Penn, joining the Amersham road at Hademere, and just beyond Amersham I should squeeze the last mile of country out of the menacing bricks and mortar by going to Sarratt. After that you come back to Buckshill and your first spring-running is finished.

.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, it was an Oxford motorist who asked me to sketch out for him a week-end run through and about the most beautiful hill-range we have within a hundred miles of Piccadilly Circus. He had never seen early spring in the Chilterns, though he thought he must often have driven across their edge on his unheeding way to town. He must, indeed, unless he deliberately went by Reading or Aylesbury, routes not to be thought of save by coach-drivers and the like. And even so he must have kept his eyes very strictly, very safely on the road not to have noticed even on a moderately clear day the faint outlines of those unrivalled hills.

Yet I do not know that it is so surprising after all, that such a request should come from a town only a dozen miles away. Do we always know the special loveliness of our own familiar surroundings? Do the lovers of the Lakes,

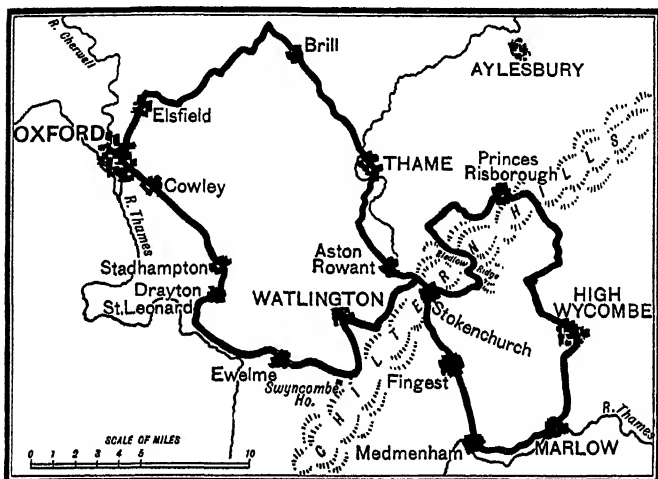
of Dartmoor, of the Cheviots, of the by-ways of Kent and Sussex, number more natives than strangers? Does every Londoner know Epping Forest or Leith Hill other than by vague repute? Is it not our instinct to go away in order to find something particularly fine, specially memorable? It is quite certain that we often live practically blind to beauty others know and appreciate beyond anything they themselves are blessed with.

Treasure is the only word that attempts to define the things you see in the Chiltern Hills, and inexhaustible treasure at that. Each time you go there, whether in spring, summer, autumn, or winter, you find new things—or, if you prefer it so, very old and very private things in new settings, in new colours—even in new dimensions. For there is that magic of light and shade that mocks at distance and measurement, and, between one noon and the next, turns a little cliff in the chalk held up by ancient roots, into a beetling canyon-side; a grove into a forest. It is the unending colour-change of the beeches, no doubt, that helps to keep the woods new to their oldest friends, but they cannot have anything to do with the size-illusions. For they are nearly all very old and their spreading days are past. At all events, the loveliness of those wooded hills has the true unexpectedness of treasure trove.

It was with more delight than usual that I traced out a way for my Oxford man that should show him a little of what he had missed on his train-like journeys to and fro. It was early April yet, and the polished boles stood out in the sunshine, with hardly a shadow on them. Supposing the weather to follow the rules of the game—or even to disregard them and comfort us with what is traditionally known as a heat-wave (that is, when the thermometer is over sixty degrees for two or more days, and it doesn't rain)—they should very soon be rippling with cheating shadows thrown by the young leaves. It is a great moment, that, when

those trunks become visibly alive and supple, obviously stretching themselves after their winter sleep. The next best is when they are always in deep shade and it is only on the beechmast and moss around their mighty trunks that a pattern of light falls when the breeze remembers to pass that way.

I took the new road through Cowley to Stadhampton,



not because I like it for itself, but because I wanted to get to Drayton St. Leonard through that odd low-lying ground of which the River Thames makes so effective an obstacle in mid-winter. All this corner is still as it has always been, still safe from factories and by-passes. The Thames, it is true, can do unpleasant things to the ground-floor rooms of the pleasant old houses round about, but it makes up for them by keeping worse things at bay.

From Drayton St. Leonard, with its stories of Oliver Cromwell's battle at the ford (about fifteen feet wide I should judge), take the road to Dorchester and Shillingford

Bridge, and, abandoning the roaring London traffic, go through Benson to Ewelme, and so up by Swyncombe into the hills. At the top of the climb you join the road that leads to the top of Beacon Hill, west of Stokenchurch, but it is worth while dropping down, at Howe Hill, into Watlington simply for the sake of the joy of driving through those tunnels of beeches. You come up again to the top at Christmas Common, and then follow the road to Beacon Hill. This part of your journey will be very slow, for the views on your left are not to be missed.

Just before you reach Stokenchurch take the road on your right that leads you by Ibstone to Fingest, and so come down to Hambleden through the most alluring little valley in the Home Counties. You will not have to be told about Fingest. Though its fame is unfortunately great, it is still unspoilt. And beside the road still runs the little sparkling stream, as they do in mountain villages in France. I can never really believe that Fingest is in England at all.

Down to the river at Medmenham Abbey and beside it to Marlow you follow the road home. You have to go through High and West Wycombe and along the main road for a while, but your reward comes when you turn off to Bradenham and come through the deep Hampden woods to the top of Kop Hill and one of the best views south of the Border. You drop down that notable hill into Princes Risborough, and then take the road to Thame and Brill. The latter has nothing to do with the Chilterns, but you ought never to miss an opportunity of going there. I had very recently been, so this time I went from Risborough to Chinnor, over Bledlow Ridge and through Radnage to Stokenchurch and the old familiar road to Magdalen Bridge by Wheatley and Headington.

.

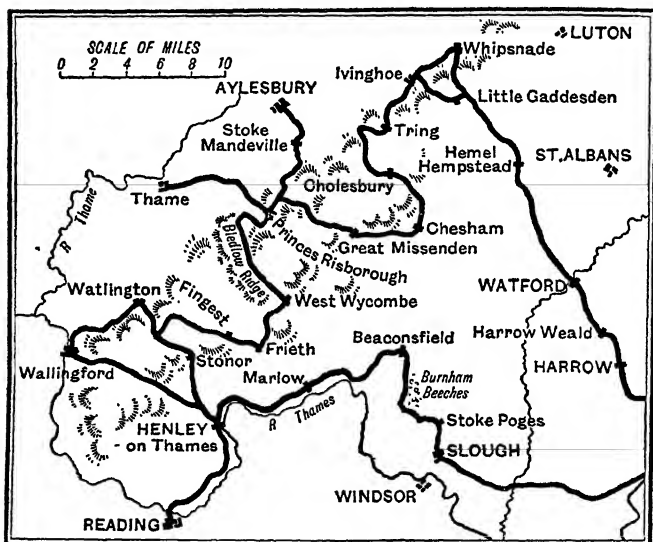
Before you come to wander among the beeches which,

twice a year, turn the hills between Luton and Henley-on-Thames into a magic place unrivalled for beauty in any corner of Europe, you will wonder why that word 'golden' should invariably be used to describe their uncountable colours in autumn. There is no more hideous metal than gold, except possibly brass—the stuff that is better named than any other—yet when that matchless time comes and you drive into the heart of all that beauty, you realize that it is the only comprehensive word that has any real meaning. The colours are of every hue between the palest lemon and the darkest browns and reds, and no single one of them is really in the least like gold. They flame and glow, sometimes solidly opaque, sometimes as translucent as the maples of Japan that turn the sunlight on the streams below them into pools of wine, but never are they as dead as gold. Are there, in reality, a thousand indistinguishable shades in that uninspired mass? Is it perhaps alive, like old silver or copper?

For you will find that word 'golden' rising in your mind before any other as you look down upon the fiery woods from Bledlow Ridge and Ivinghoe Hills, or walk under their bright shade in the Hampden glades and down by the river at Medmenham. Perhaps it is the association of richness, though the wealth of the Chiltern trees is far beyond computation. Perhaps it is because burnished gold has a very faint suggestion of cold sunlight and the sunlight of October is a pale radiance. Yet no gold, no sunlight has colours like those leaves which, you are prepared to swear, must gleam as vividly in the night as at noon.

Let it stand, since there is no answer. In November it is time to set aside a week-end, or, better still, several days chosen out of a couple of weeks or more, for the last and best drives of the year in the Chiltern Hills. If you are a Londoner I advise you to go this way. Take the fairly inoffensive road to Watford by way of Harrow Weald and

then keep straight on for Hemel Hempstead. Hereabouts it is suburban going, but not for many miles. By the time you have left the Gaddesdens behind and are climbing into the Ivinghoe Hills, you will have forgotten the villas and the bus services, and the first sight of the woods will do the rest. You will forget to read your map as you will forget the time, bewitched by miles of colour unmatched anywhere in the tropics.



The best of the view from the top of the Ivinghoe Hills is behind you, and you will do well to remember it. There are many places where you must stop and look about you in the Chilterns, and this is the first of them. From Beacon Hill, the edge of the little range, you may be able to see Whipsnade, a couple of miles to the east, and it is easy enough to get there. Next come Ivinghoe itself and a stretch of the Icknield Way as far as the junction with Akeman Street, west of Tring. This respectable thorough-

fare avoids Tring and all its neat ways, passing to the north of that desperately genteel township. You may be glad of this if your day is a fine Saturday or Sunday.

Where three roads meet you take the first to the left and get back into the woods by the road to Chesham via Cholesbury. If you pine for stiffer climbing you need only go a little farther on the way to Wendover and take the next to the left. Here you take the narrow path over Coombe Hill and come to Cholesbury by St. Leonards. I have this by hearsay only, and I will not be held accountable for any disappointment or misadventure. I went the first way, and was delighted. You will drive very slowly.

At Chesham you take the road to Great Missenden and then the lanes between the green and silver boles to the top of the high hill overlooking Princes Risborough, where you stop again for a long time. It is one of the finest views in all England. Arrived at the bottom, you pass through Risborough and follow the Watlington road as far as Bledlow, where you take the road over Bledlow ridge to West Wycombe and the by-ways that go to Christmas Common and Watlington, Swyncombe, and Stonor. It is only a little way on the map, but it will take you easily an hour.

On the edge of Oxfordshire, a mile or so above Watlington, you find that little road that runs from Beacon Hill to Ewelme, high up on the scarp that marks the end of the Chilterns. To look at, you would not believe that it is the Icknield Way, but so it is, according to the map. Just short of it is another that takes you through Christmas Common and round by Cookley Green to Stonor and Henley, where you come down to the river level for the first time for many miles. Take the left-hand road at the river and find your way to Beaconsfield by Marlow and Bourne End, where you finally leave the Chilterns. Yet you have still the golden trees about you, for the last of your run lies through Burnham Beeches on the way to

Stoke Poges and Slough. They are not very many, but when they are alone they are as lovely as any you have left in the high hills behind.

.

Year after year we go to those hills, following ways which are, on the map, as familiar as the paths of our own garden, and each time we arrive to find that the only thing about them we recognize are the signposts. The woods, the views, the very roads themselves are never the same, always more lovely than before. Like nearly every unspoilt corner of England, they are an inexhaustible treasure of beauty.

For unspoilt they are, an obvious miracle. They are hedged in to the east and north by suburban settlements of a specially aggressive kind, they have for their centre a disagreeable and ugly town of manufactures, yet the moment you are off the mercifully few main roads that cut through them you are alone in a land on which the foul touch of villadom has not yet fallen. The deep peace of the woods which flow down east from the wind-shorn brow of Whiteleaf Hill to Hughenden and Great Missenden, the look-out through the clearings over the valleys to the neighbouring hill-tops blazing scarlet and orange and sulphur to the sky, are free from the taint. There are certain parts of England that are immune from the plague, no matter how hard pressed by it they may be. The Chilterns must be blessed in the same way.

You can, with only moderate luck and a little careful planning, wander all day in peaceful solitude, even though you come now and then within sight or reach of a town, and there are glades in the woods and natural watch-towers in the hills, served for the most part by rough and narrow lanes, where you can spend an hour with no sound to break your content but the music of the trees and the running

whisper of the wind. If you see a woodman you will only hear the comfortable noises of his work or the lazy jingle of his horses' harness.

There are many parts of the Chiltern woods to please you and a number of ways of reaching them. Last year, it seemed to me that the southern end was the best of them. There was probably no other reason for this, better or worse, than the day itself—an arrangement in blue and gold and silver, in flying shadows and dazzling patches of sunshine, quite perfect, quite special to an English autumn—but there was no doubt about it. For the moment there was nothing so fine to see.

You begin at the southern end at Pangbourne. This is, to my mind, the best beginning of all, because it is the most sudden. You leave the Thames and, taking the road through Whitchurch, come in a mile or less to the foot of the hills and the first of their beeches. A respectably steep climb up through the woods brings you by Checkendon and Nuffield to the Oxford road at Huntercombe. The signposts are none too helpful, and you must resist all suggestions of Wallingford or Henley, or you will get lost in the sense that you will know only too well where you are.

You turn to the right opposite the golf club and then take the first to the left. This takes you by Park Corner and a winding road to Cookley Green and Christmas Common, from which you will get views of the golden woods hanging on the hill-sides beyond like brilliant tapestries. At the common you turn to the left and drop down through the heart of them, slipping noiselessly down a tunnel of amber light, through the sides of which the sunshine lights up the farther tree-boles (is there a more gaily beautiful tree?) and shows you the smiling levels of Oxfordshire far below.

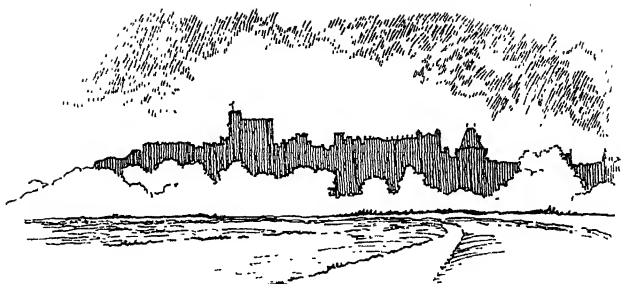
Watlington lies at the bottom of the tunnel, but you turn away from it, right-handed, as you reach it, and follow

the open road under the edge of the hills as far as Chinnor. It is the least dull of flat roads. Fortunately it is usually empty, for you can hardly keep your eyes from straying to the right, where the woods are massed in glowing ranks four hundred feet above you. The passage of your car fills the air with whirling leaves, crimson, and all the colours belonging to it, drifting to right and left as regularly as the wash of a boat.

At Chinnor you turn to the right along the Wycombe road, which climbs up Bledlow Ridge, but at a mile from a farmstead, astonishingly called City, you turn sharp to the left for Princes Risborough. There is a spot on a hill-side, a mile or two farther on, where you come out into the open and look across to the Three Hundred of Aylesbury, a place for a long halt. Princes Risborough, miraculously changed to a village of picture beauty, lies below, with Whiteleaf Cross gleaming above on the flank of Kop Hill. And all about you are the golden woods again, breaking like waves down the hill-sides.

Climb Kop and disappear into the woods beyond, and when you must go make for Great Hampden and Missenden, and turn back through the Wycombes to Fingest and Hambleden, and Henley, finding your way to Pangbourne by Rotherfield Peppard and Cane End. It will take you all day, and only darkness will be able to drive you from the woods.





CHAPTER XIX

A HILL IN HAMPSHIRE—SOME CURIOUS FACTS— THE THAMES ITSELF—ROUND LONDON

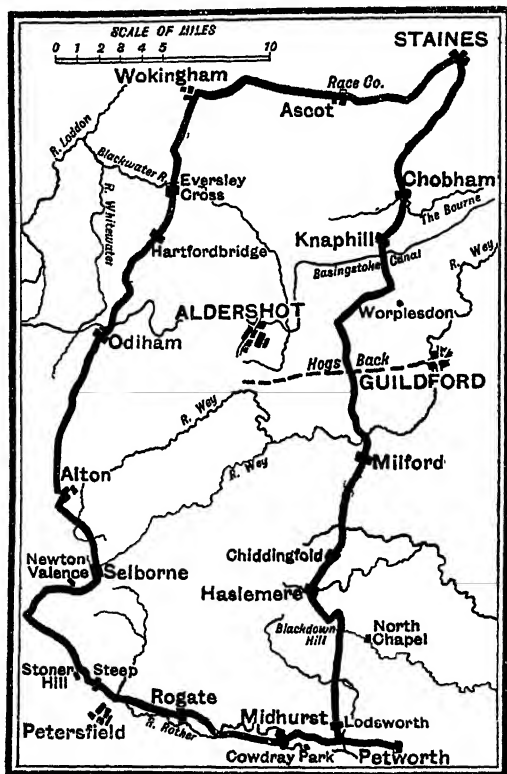
THOSE who spend much of their time wandering about the English roads and exploring the out-of-the-way corners for the limitless treasures of English scenery, will have realized one main and inexplicable fact about this most beautiful of all lands. No matter how familiar a given spot may be, no matter how often you may have visited it, every time you see it it is different, and every time, it seems to me, it has taken new beauties to itself. That is its peculiar magic, the magic of Britain.

.

The day was of that kind which you will only find in England in May—a perfect blue sky with fat silver clouds sailing in it, and the lightest of north-west breezes, but I felt as I dawdled marvellously through that blessed country that I had never seen anything like it before.

I took as my main objectives the little patch of country which lies between Alton and Petersfield, Midhurst and Hindhead, a part about which you would have thought there was nothing fresh whatever to be discovered. The hundred and fifty miles I drove on that day made a quite

perfect Home Counties cruise. Go first to Wokingham by way of Staines and Ascot, and turn off in the town on to the Odiham road by way of Eversley Cross and Hartfordbridge



Bridge. You join the main Basingstoke road at the latter place, and follow it as far as Phoenix Green, and then bear to the left through Odiham and over the high ground to Alton.

A couple of miles out of the town, keep a sharp look out for a turn under a railway bridge to the left, and then

follow a winding little lane, high-hedged, narrow, and solitary, to Selborne. You see the hill as you approach it, standing up like some bluff moorland head. On that great day its dark sides were striped with the light and shade of flying clouds, which look so extremely improbable in pictures. It is the first of many delightful surprises of the run. Keep to the right and follow the road, which circles round the foot of the hill, until you come to Newton Valence, the shyest little village you ever saw, and to the explorer the least expected. Hereabouts the roads are confusing, and the safest plan is to ask for the way to East Tisted and Colmore. Eventually, after agreeably blind wanderings, you will come out on the Fareham road near Colmore Common, and you should follow it for another two miles as far as Privett station. Turn here again under the railway and head for Petersfield. The road, still deserted and growing more beautiful every mile, swings up to some seven hundred feet to the top of Stonor Hill. The descent of this will take you a long time, as you will be constantly having to stop to marvel at the beauty of the deep ravine on your left and the immense views across the heads of the young beeches and larches. Stonor Hill is certainly one of the most beautiful places in the county of Hampshire.

At Petersfield turn eastward again, along the Portsmouth road as far as the third turning to the right. This takes you across Rogate Common, and nowhere in England, to my knowledge, will you find so spectacular and violent a change of scenery. You have the tidy, tarred Portsmouth road, all telegraph poles, efficiency and speed, and, one hundred yards later, solitary uplands of heather, with the horizon a most comfortable number of miles away, and in between nothing but hills and woods.

Before you get to Midhurst you will come across another piece of most ancient England. This is a signpost inscribed 'To Fairyland'. A rustic of the real type told me that this

was not, as I suggested, a feeble joke on the part of some urban settler. It is, he assured me, the real name of one of the oldest farms in England. He added, however, that 'he hadn't seen no fairies'. I am not so sure about that. Those Little People, what had they done with the road I wanted, which is clearly marked on my admirable map, running a mile or so parallel? It was not there that particular day.

You cross Cowdray Park, and immediately after the gates turn sharp to the left on the road to Lodsworth and Haslemere. This, above all others, is the place which is absolutely different every time you see it. The little road ran through an exquisite valley carpeted with golden gorse, out of which stood here and there blossom of dazzling white. If anybody lives there (I did not meet a single human being for eight miles), I hope they realize how singularly blessed they are. Take care not to turn off anywhere to Chiddingfold or North Chapel, but bear to the left until, by a hilly little road buried in beeches and oaks, you come into Haslemere. It is quite certain that you will then turn round and go back again, lest those fairies should have spirited the whole thing away while your back was turned.

.

It is on one of those rare November days, when for a few hours the sky glows blue as the sea, clear as in mid-June, that the roads between Hampton Court and Oxford must be leisurely explored if the tradition that the Thames Valley is an impossible place after September is to be disproved. Certainly they must be passionate lovers of the river who sincerely prefer to live on its banks during the winter rather than anywhere else. Very few parts of England, always excepting the smoky country of the Midlands or the murk of east Yorkshire, can be quite so depressing, provide so good an argument against wintering anywhere except on high

ground or the sea-coast. It gets the first and the last of the fogs, the thickest of them and the coldest. The river itself is capable of inexcusable trespass, involving bitter discomfort. Not idly was the ancient jest given life about the riparian dweller who advertised his house as having the river at the bottom of his garden in summer, and his garden at the bottom of the river in winter. He might have added more than the garden, as many will bear witness. Not much less than the Nile does the Thames need control.

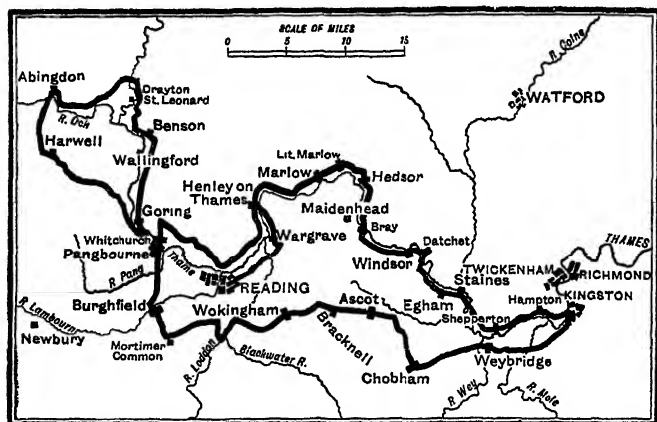
Yet few places in England have such scenery, so typically English a setting. There are a great many abominable villas between Staines and Wallingford, blatant in a fine summer, draggled and dreary in winter; but it is a curious fact that once the fallen leaves have begun to gild the grey roads, these sorry things seem to lose their power of destruction. You scarcely notice them, even those that blazed the loudest in August with lobelias and scarlet geraniums. They have shrunk, very properly, into the background, giving place to the real river-side country, whose architecture is of the farm school. Fields and stacks and the gentle peace of old days delight your eye instead.

There are fine old English mansions here and there, usually well above the level of the stream, looking out between their attendant coverts over the valley. A few of them may be show-places for all I know, very likely for their gardens, but there is hardly one that does not wear the inimitable air of dignified age that never changes, the air you expect to find anywhere except in the Thames Valley. The vigorous grace of bygone centuries is jostled by cheap imitation—jostled but untouched, clamoured about but aloof. Only in England will you see this.

It will be on a day of blue and gold and red, if you have the luck I had last year, that you will realize once more how the most familiar roads along the Thames can change overnight. They had said the beeches would die in a smudge

of faded colour. They were wrong, as they nearly always are. At the last moment they made amends, snatched victory from a week's cold sunshine. Wherever you went among those generous trees, from Hedsor Woods to Streatley, you saw the proper red-gold, the gleaming sulphur—most moving of all those uncounted tints—the rich brown reflected in the water.

The river road is not continuous, but a series of pictures



linked sometimes by inland ways through high woods, sometimes by roads that wander miles from the stream. I know no better beginning than Kingston and the road that skirts Bushy Park and passes Hampton Court on its way to Weybridge. In summer it is at its worst, but later on, when the only crowded hours are the morning and evening, it is peaceful enough. Follow the road to Laleham and Staines, and at the first fork on the Bagshot road take the turning to the right. This brings you back to the river along Egham Meads and past Runnymede; and, especially if you remember what those pleasant fields below Cooper's Hill were like a few weeks ago, you will be seriously perturbed

about your memory. This is once more, something new.

Keep on through Old Windsor and, to the right, through Datchet, that singularly fortunate village which seems never to be touched by anything but time. It has the village green of the pictures, and its river-side houses are of the right kind. One of them, grey brick of the old sort, has an immense wistaria over its door and a grove of perfect lilacs for privacy. It looks straight out across the river and the Home Park to Windsor Castle, standing up on the skyline like a rock. That must be a great view, whose owners are to be envied.

After Windsor you follow the road near the river at Bray and on to the Bath road. Turn to the right, cross the bridge, and take the road on your left to Cliveden and Hedsor, and Bourne End—a better way, I think, than the shorter by Cookham. From here, as far as Henley, the way runs between the Thames and the Chiltern Hills, through Little and Great Marlow, and past the lovely stretch of Medmenham Abbey. It is remarkably beautiful, and you will revise all your preconceived notions about the Thames Valley. After Henley it grows even more lovely, especially by Wargrave, on the Twyford road. This is not the straight way, but it is the way to follow if you do not want to miss Sonning, easily the most attractive village on the whole river. Again, it is only in autumn that such places are to be properly understood. Sonning is unique.

You can avoid Reading by keeping to the right after Caversham (do not cross the bridge), reaching Pangbourne by the winding road through the woods to Cray's Pond and Whitchurch, and it is well worth your while to make the detour. You come down to the river again at Pangbourne, at its most familiar stretch, the reach between there and Basildon and Streatley. All the way along here to Wallingford the road keeps close to the river, and it is

from near Streatley, where it runs well above it, that you get what is perhaps the loveliest sight of the river of them all. The trees stood gold and yellow about the curve, and the glow was as real in the river's face as on the leaves.

Go on to Wallingford and down to Shillingford Bridge (has any river in the world such bridges as the Thames?), and then make your turning-point Drayton St. Leonard, on the Thame. History, or possibly legend, says that Cromwell, after his battle at the tiny ford, imitating Queen Elizabeth, slept in the best bedroom at the Old Manor, part of which house was two hundred years old even then. It is all there still, including Oliver's bedroom. You can go home either by Abingdon and the Berkshire downs, or by the same road as far as Pangbourne, where you turn off to Burghfield and Wokingham, for Weybridge and Staines.

.

The new by-passes, which were designed to make it easier to enter and leave London, and, eventually to avoid it altogether, have come in for a good deal of abuse, some of it well deserved; but nobody will deny that, however chaotic their progress to completion, however badly some of them are built, certain portions of them are of great value to the London motorist, especially when he is looking for a winter day's drive and time is of importance. They offer, in turn, examples of the surface best suited to modern traffic and of the absolute worst; they are not always wide enough for safety; they still have inconvenient gaps and pauses in their continuity; still, we owe a great deal to them — amongst other things, practically deserted roads on Sunday. They attract ninety per cent of the week-end traffic, leaving the old ways, once nightmares of congestion, comparatively empty.

One of the best ways of discovering their useful qualities

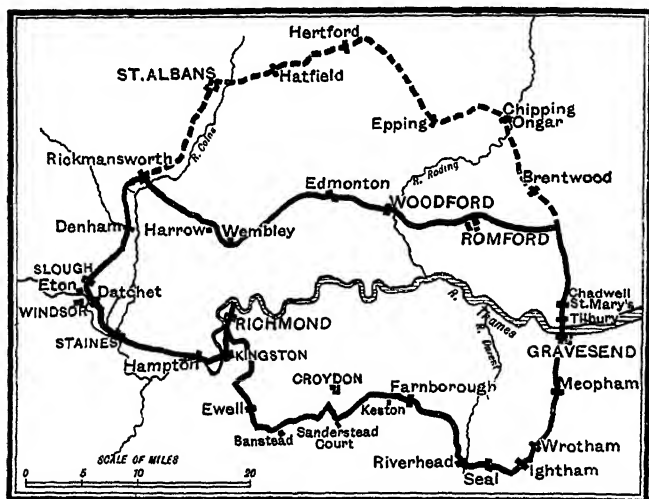
is to plan a drive round London. Indeed, if they had no other use, they would more than justify their existence for making such a drive possible, especially at this time of the year. Until they came into being it was practically impossible to discover London's edges without being constantly lost in a wilderness of slums. Now you can spend a long December day very delightfully in drawing a circle about it, with only an occasional experience of grimy streets or the sadder suburbs.

I make a point of its being a December day because London, like all cities north of the Channel, is a winter city. It shows its real beauty best in these misty December days, and that beauty is an exquisite thing, which it did not need Whistler to show us. Under the pale but very effectual fire of the winter sun the loveliness of London from its incredibly white house-tops to the sheen on the river, at Richmond or Erith, glows in a magic light unknown in the sharp-lit south. You always think of the river when they speak of London's enduring beauty, that river which is more disgracefully disfigured, more sinfully wasted than any other, with its medley of charm and abomination, its barges below the Tower, its bridges (which include the most hideous ever made), the cold, meretricious look of the Houses of Parliament, the austere loveliness of Somerset House, the blatant face of the County Hall, with its mercifully unique combination of façade and roof, the friendly, human ugliness of the hospital, and the waterfronts of Putney and Hammersmith.

It is best, at this time of year, to begin your circuit of the biggest town in the world from west to east, and then cross the river. You get the best of the winter sunlight that way—at least, so it seemed to me when I began the cruise at Richmond Park, and struck down, by the Kingston by-pass, from Robin Hood's Gate, to Ewell and the Banstead downs. At Purley the way becomes rather tricky, and a large-scale

map is necessary. Immediately after crossing the Godstone road turn to the right, away from Croydon, and at Sanderstead Court turn to the left for Addington and Keston Common, one of the best open spaces of south London, where you will be tempted to linger over the magnificent views of the town to the north and east.

At Lock's Bottom you join the Sevenoaks road and



follow it as far as Riverhead, where you must bear to the right along the picturesque road through Seal and Igham to Wrotham, where you begin to climb. It is admirably arranged for you, as when you reach the top of the hill you are nearly eight hundred feet up, and on your gentle slide down to Meopham and Gravesend you get more splendid views of both sides of the river and an impression of the vast city just out of sight on your left. These last few miles down to the outskirts of Gravesend are delightful country, alternately wooded and open, very characteristic of Kent.

Once across the ferry and beyond Tilbury the change from those brown hills to the grey-green levels of Essex is very effective. It is probably the quickest change in scenery anywhere in England, for if you do not count the approaches to Gravesend and Tilbury, there is only the width of the river between two utterly different stretches of country. If you have a clear day, look back when you are beyond Chadwell St. Mary's. There should be a great view of the North Downs.

You join the new Southend road, closely related to by-passes, some ten miles north of the river, and from here until you have left Edmonton behind and are on or near the great by-pass which will one day connect east to west with an unbroken line, you must put up with streets and trams. There is no help for it unless you like to strike north through Brentwood to Ongar and Epping and Ware, Hatfield, and St. Albans, joining the round-London road at Rickmansworth. That is certainly a pleasant thing to do, but you must have time for it, more time perhaps than a December day will allow you, unless you finish the cruise in the dark. The streets, however, by Woodford and Edmonton, are quickly passed on a Sunday, and as quickly forgotten by the time you are through Wembley and at Harrow.

Here is a place from which to look at London, and you would be wise to leave your car and go up to Byron's tomb, for a sight of Windsor Castle, and on to the terrace for another, of the sea of houses which will soon be flowing past but can never engulf the school. It is peculiarly satisfying to realize that an ancient place, in its patch of green fields, ten miles from Hyde Park Corner, can never be obliterated by flats. Not very much money saved Harrow, but no amount of it will ever avail to bring about her destruction. Let us drive quickly back and jeer at the jerry-builders and estate-agents.

Not the quickest but the best way home is by

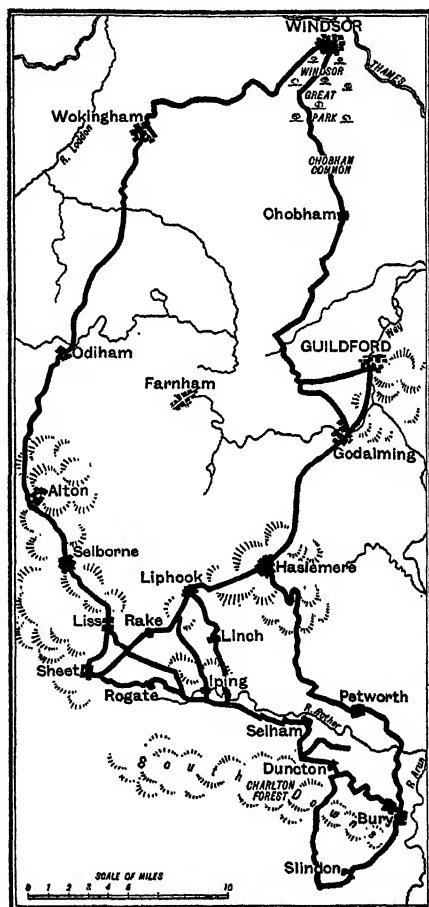
Rickmansworth, and then south to Denham, Slough, Eton, Datchet, and along Egham Meads to Staines, and so back to Richmond by Hampton and over Kingston Bridge.

.

There is always, in all seasons and in all weathers, except fog, every reason why the London owner of a car and a day's leisure should turn naturally towards that jewel of the Londoner's country, the place where Hampshire, Berkshire, Sussex, and Surrey come together, where winter is at its loveliest. Strictly speaking, of course, these counties do not all meet simultaneously, but there are two places where a selected three of them join borders, in the pine-woods Frimley way, where Berkshire, Hampshire, and Surrey touch, and in the oak, hazel, and birch copses between Liphook and Haslemere, where Sussex, Surrey, and Hampshire form so splendid an alliance. In spring, summer, and autumn this peculiarly blessed patch of England is expectedly beautiful, but you do not know more than half of its charm—however much of it may have been told you—until you have spent a day or two exploring it in winter.

There is always a reason. There are a thousand, if you care to count them. There are places between the Arun and the Loddon, the Thames and the Meon, which are just as beautiful in January as in May or October, in bitter cold as in such warmth as is at times doled out to us; on a grey day, say Twelfth Night, for example, as on one of gleaming frost and pale bright sun. Hindhead and the Devil's Punch Bowl, almost unapproachable on a summer's week-end; the woods about Petworth and Duncton; Chobham ridges, and the approaches to the South Downs, all have their special loveliness in these cold short days, when we have them practically to ourselves. They seem more intimate, to show themselves more clearly as private property.

They must once have been largely private land, and if they can still hold that look seven or eight centuries later, beset



for three-quarters of the year by intensive modern traffic, it may take longer to socialize the world according to the most fashionable recipe than reformers might wish.

Above all there reigns the strange charm of winter, so vivid yet so evasive that only every other traveller remarks it. It is the colour of the bare trees, the grey and blue of beech and elm, poplar and willow, the indefinite warm brown and yellow of plane and oak, and, liveliest of them all, the purple and dark jade of pines and firs; the colour and the shape. There are few things more beautiful than the rounded swell of a wood in a valley of the downs; the four-square defiance of a spinney climbing steeply to the sky's edge above a broad stretch of arable land; forms as gracious, as inevitable as the hues that paint the land in spring and autumn with so bold and delicate a brush that no painter can do better for himself than surrender. The shape of English trees in winter is one of the glories of our incomparable country, from the smiling company of a row of poplars or a clump of birches by the wayside, to the dignity of a single oak in a park-ride, of the delicate spread of an elm's branches seen a mile away against the morning sky.

Here is a drive I followed one day, when London choked in desolating fog, and not even the park could show the outlines of a tree that has lived there since the days of Hyde—a drive that gave me studies in colour and shape to last me many years. I started from Windsor, taking the road to Ascot through the forest, a way as well-worn as Piccadilly and as full of variety. You will hardly find more splendid examples of ancient oaks than here. Observe their outlines and admit their perfection and the vision of the man who planted each of them in just that particular place—or, if you like, of the man who thinned them out. It is like the pattern of an old Japanese garden designed by an artist who looks for the completion of his design some three hundred years after his death.

Go on then to Waltham St. Lawrence and Wokingham and come down across Hartford Bridge Flats to Odiham and Alton and strike across country by Selborne and Liss to the

Portsmouth road. Here you are on the edge of the country of mixed oaks and pines and birches, and I do not know which to recommend you of three ways. You can go on up the Portsmouth road to Liphook and come down by that exquisite woodland road through Linch and Lord's Common to Woolbeding; or turn to your right till you reach Sheet and then cross Rogate Common; or, perhaps best of all, follow the winding road from Rake through Iping and Woolbeding. Any of these must be the best, for all are beautiful, and from all you will understand once more the haunting beauty of leafless trees.

All three bring you to Midhurst and Cowdray Park (where the trees equal those of Windsor) and the mysterious turn down through the tunnel of dark boles that leads eventually to Graffham and the road along the foot of the South Downs past East Lavington to the bottom of Duncton Hill. Here you can either turn to the right and climb up through the beeches to the windswept downhead, heading north again by Slindon and Bury Hill, or you can adventure upon the lanes that take you straight to Bury village by way of Bignor. I took the first, but whichever you choose brings you to Pulborough and Petworth, where you must take the left-hand road at the edge of the town. Two miles on, you turn to the right again and drive up towards Haslemere along one of the enchanted ways.

It takes you past Lodsworth to Dial Green and round the scarp of Blackdown Hill, and there is truly nothing like it in all England. Knowing it perhaps only in its state of infinite grace in May or June, when the gorse is alight and there are primroses in the ditches and bluebells among the tree-trunks, you might not suspect its winter charm. It will delight you and perhaps give you another view of the dark days of the year at home. Let us thank God the railway knows nothing of it, nor any arterial or by-pass road, nor ever will.

